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CULTURAL RELATIVISM AND LITERARY VALUE Second Series

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Editor

Amiya Dev

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We are again late in bringing out this issue and we apologize to our readers. In this issue we are printing the second series of papers from the international seminar we held at the department under UGC sponsorship on "Cultural Relativism and Literary Value" on 19-21 March, 1987. The following is a brief note on our authors for this series.

Pramod Talgheri is a Professor of German at the School of Languages, Jawaharlal University, New Delhi. + Gurbhagat Singh is a Reader in English at Panjabi University, Patiala. + Professor Jasbir Jain teaches English at Rajasthan University, Jaipur. + Gabriel Okara is a poet and novelist from Nigeria. + Ayyappa Paniker has recently retired from the teaching of English at the University of Kerala in Trivandrum. + C.T.Indra teaches English at Madras University. + Himani Bannerji teaches Sociology at York University, Toronto. + Mahasweta Sengupta currently teaches at Poona University.

The Comprehension of the 'Otherness' of an Alien Culture: The Experience of Difference in Identity

Pramod Talgheri

Understanding an alien culture always appears to be a 'misunderstanding'. But this misunderstanding can be eventually taken as a constructive form of the reception of an alien culture. In a sense all understanding is destructuring and reconceiving a framework. The encounter with an alien culture would, in the first instance, amount to a confrontation of two heterogeneous sensibilities which are conditioned by the intrinsic value systems of their respective cultures. Such a confrontation would most probably evoke a resistance to experiencing the 'otherness' of the alien culture. It may even obscure the understanding and block any possibility of a meaningful communication.

This resistance to experiencing the 'otherness' arises from a strong sense of identification on the part of individuals with their own culture. They are deeply rooted in their cultural tradition, but do not possess the intellectual flexibility of displacing themselves consciously from their stable positioning in their cultural ethos. Now, how do I as a member of a particular cultural community come to recognize myself as part of a collective consciousness which shares an identical sense of intimacy, familiarity and affinity with a particular value system and dissociates itself from other value systems? How is it that my comparisons for identification in an alien object are limited to analogical parallels? How do my preconditioned notions of conviction give way to finalistic interpretations?

By virtue of my being born to and having grown up in a particular community I develop an intransitive attitude of unconditional identification with the objects, the historical events, social actions and natural surroundings of this community in various degrees of priority. This intransitive attitude of unconditional identification constitutes a value which we associate with a certain object. It does not call any discursive formation, nor does it allow any interpretation.

Value is an absolute subjugation to the object, though its genesis might be diversely determined and historically conditioned. All cultural requisites of a communication have to be perceived in relation to the values attached to them. On the basis of an elaborate value code, which I acquire in the course of my living in my community along with all its other members, I also cultivate a peculiar way of experiencing and reacting to the world, identically shared by the other members. Now, there emerges an institutional consistency in the continuity of identification with this intrinsic value system of the community. My sensibilities are now geared up to respond to the world in accordance with this value system. With this I develop a consciousness of the continuity of my own tradition.

This consciousness of the continuity of my own tradition gives me a kind of security and consistency in practising and understanding my own culture. I believe to have an understanding of my own culture in that my hermeneutic operations within my own cultural environment are based on the "interactive reciprocity" (1) of the members of my own cultural community. That means, the individuals do recognize and respect the rights and duties of the other members reciprocally and independently. The internalizations of cultural codes and norms give me the necessary confidence in interacting with the members of my own community. This is the formation of the collective identity of the individual members of a cultural group. Hegel conceives this dialectical conceptual structure as a process of self-consciousness of reciprocal cognizance and recognition of the members of a society through a normatively developed inter-subjectivity: "Es ist ein Selbstbewusstsein für ein anderes Selbstbewusstsein zunächst unmittelbar als ein Anderes für ein Anderes. Ich schaue in ihm als Ich mich selbst an, aber auch darin ein unmittelbar daseindes, als Ich absolut gegen mich selbständiges anderes Objekt." (2) This reciprocally recognized and generalized self-consciousness is, according to Hegel, the spirit (Geist) that objectivizes itself into norms and common ways of life and forms a collective identity of the individual members on the basis of these reciprocally recognized codes.

This collective identity guarantees a consistency in the reciprocal responses in the multifarious interactions of the community's members, thus creating a plurality of cultural reflexes which constitute, to twist Edward Hall's definition of culture, "that part of man's behaviour which he takes for granted". (3) The cultural reflexes, which have initially originated from certain functional necessities, become in the process determinate elements of a cultural communication.

A multitude of these different and simultaneous social determinants, which constitute the totality of the cultural interaction, refer to certain social intentions and are based on a central, effective and prevalent system of values and norms. (4) The codification of these norms, mythological ideas, and the continuation of traditional practices steer and coordinate the recognized behaviour of a cultural community. It is these organized cultural activities that convey a sense of reality of our culture. The social intentions, which are manifest in this reality, mostly relate to the satisfaction of specific human needs. The objective of fulfilling these

needs creates a normative framework within which the organized activities of the individuals and institutions take place and bring about a sense of accomplishment. The value system of a cultural community has thus a direct relationship with the members' strong attachment to such activities, objects, persons and norms with which they would like to identify themselves. Every society itself acquires its own identity. Every society acquires its own identity through its own accomplishments in various fields of human endeavour. At the same time this identity is itself a motivating force from within, initiating and forming "a social life coherence".(5) So culture emerges as a process of total objectivization of man's activities in a particular society with a view to forming a meaningful social coherence of human life.

How does the "social life coherence" of a culture come into being? Society as a functional structure organizes a division of labour according to which every individual member plays a number of different roles corresponding to his private and public functions.(6) From each such role so determined a certain behaviour of the individual member is expected by society as a whole. Such behavioural expectations create a certain code of conduct and their fulfilment by the individuals smooths the social communication. In this way the individual acquires diverse established forms of behaviour generally recognized in the various basic institutions of society (e.g. family, clan, community, village, city, state).(7)

The individual member has to adjust his behaviour--voluntarily or reluctantly--to his 'role-life'. In this fashion the behaviour of every member of society is defined and determined in the 'game of roles'. Accordingly, a functional system of roles comes into being. It has an interdependent character and absorbs the diverse interests of individuals and groups in an interactional structure. These private and institutional interests create in this process of social interaction the reciprocal 'behavioural expectations' of a culture, which correspond to the individual roles or group roles as the case may be. The culture comes into being in that the behaviour of all the members of a society is integrated in the reciprocally accepted structures of public expectations.

The individual assimilates these 'expectation-structures' in his social 'role-behaviour' and produces, for the purpose of an (apparently) smooth social communication, certain hackneyed forms of living and built-in behavioural reflexes which gradually assume the form of socially valid norms, which in their turn give rise to conventions. The major function of social conventions lies in safeguarding to some extent a continuity of forms of social actions (rites, customs, etc.) and the stability of 'behavioural expectations' through which traditions are formed.(8)

Every individual is involved in this kind of communication structure and thus develops a consciousness of his "role identity"(9) through which he receives the inner strength to identify himself with the interests of the basic institutions of society. At this point a 'symbolic unity' of the individual member is achieved in relation to the 'symbolic reality' of society.(10) According to Habermas, this 'role

identity' is oriented towards certain special roles, norms or particular traditions. With this it can demarcate its own cultural surroundings and can distinguish it from other groups or communities.(11)

Within these demarcated cultural surroundings the process of social communication is now comparatively less inhibited and gets automatized to a large extent, since the communication is now based on the reciprocally recognized norms.(12) This process of 'norm formation' and norm consolidation is generally represented in literature by a particular bias on the part of the writer.

The multitude of such intertwined determinants is however not reducible to a centred, final understanding. They rather go into the making of a "decentred structure"(13) of a cultural framework, within which they enable the individual members to interact with each other in consistency with the 'symbolic reality' of their own community. However, the cultural reflexes which include all hackneyed forms of 'typical' behaviour and codified responses and reactions for the purpose of an expeditious understanding should not be mistaken for a 'cultural context'. They rather constitute the requisites for the emergence of a cultural context. A cultural situation may exemplify the contextual reference to these reflexes or it may even transcend them and assume a different semiotic reference. Functionally the reflexes, as mentioned above, smooth the social communication to a large extent and rationalize and automatize certain aspects of social behaviour.

The writer as an individual member of society plays his role as expected by society. As an interpreter of his social reality he, however, is always a 'principled evaluator'. He ponders over the existing life-coherence of his cultural reality. The prevalent norms of his cultural surroundings he discovers in his literary depiction of reality as an outcome of human actions, as mere conventions, which possess a certain functionality but have lost the general human content in the sense of 'interactive reciprocity'. When one becomes aware of the particularity of the values and norms of one's own culture, one realizes the necessity of looking for a more meaningful alternative in the place of the so far valid, so far unquestionably valid, traditional cultural order.

Encounter with an alien culture would at this juncture evoke a consciousness of rupture in the continuity of identification with some of the determinate elements of an alien culture. This consciousness of rupture would produce an irritation in the sensibilities which were hitherto oriented to a congenial value system. It would temporally dissolve all traditional parameters of orientation, existent within the expectational horizon of the subject. The knowledge about the coherence of the cultural requisites, based on these parameters, had grown into a value judgement. The confrontation with the alien culture would disorient the application of the unicultural parameters. But in this process of 'disorientation' the receptive subject would become aware of its specificity, of its own self vis-a-vis the alien reality, in that the subject would experience itself as if displaced from its stable positioning in its cultural tradition. The consistency in the continuity of

identification is broken in that the structure of cohesive understanding of the alien object disintegrates. Any conscious attempt to 'understand' the alien object would therefore signify a transgression of culturally codified rules of interaction and thus effect a perpetual unmaking of the subject, which is otherwise firmly rooted in its culture.

The alien cultural reality would present itself as a network of multiple and seemingly contradicting social practices, which would generate pluralistic structures of communication. The complexity and plurality of these cultural determinants would elude affinity and closeness and impede every possibility of identification, since these determinants have acquired their communicative functions from the intrinsic value system, which may partially or entirely be heterogeneous and thereby effecting a disorientation for a value judgement.

The understanding of the 'otherness' is thus not a univocal but essentially pluralistic comprehension. The supposedly smooth univocal 'understanding' of the 'otherness' is nothing but a patchwork of identifiable elements of so-called 'universals' of 'general human interests', which one anticipates to 'rediscover' while reading an alien literary text. But at the same time innumerable details representing the reality of the alien culture are simply not registered in the consciousness, since the cultural contexts of these details cannot be grasped due to the indeterminate plurality of the cultural codes suggested through these details.(14) A univocal understanding of the alien culture would take a view of the culture as a centred structure, as a place from which one specific understanding radiates. Even a seemingly unified cultural situation has to a large extent contradictory or interweaving determinants, which operate in the cultural situation at particular historical moments.

The 'alienness' of the culture emanates from the indeterminate heterogeneity of its requisites which are embedded in the intrinsic value system. This gives rise to contradictory interpretations. Other 'congenial' understanding of the alienness would arise as a result of a superficial identification with some of the determinants. An alien cultural phenomenon would not permit a seamless unity of comprehension, since culture due to its overdetermined character has to be comprehended as a 'decentred structured'. With its more complexly structured communication and less unified concept of understanding an alien culture would always permit a wide range of interpretations, which may be produced without departing from the cultural determinants.

Since there are no prescribed acts of parameters for the analysis of the alien culture, our understanding would tend to openness and indeterminacy and would therefore continue to be a perpetual metonymic struggle where attributes are substituted for the names of things meant. In this sense the understanding of the alien culture would always remain perspectivistic, "an entrance into a network with a thousand entrances", (15) to transpose Barthes's description of a literary text to the phenomenon of alien culture.

In the face of such a pluralistic understanding of the 'alien' which cannot be

fathomed but can only be experienced with a consciousness of rupture, would it be sensible to talk of 'assimilation' of alien values and norms? Assimilation in this context would not mean the destruction of the 'otherness;' or the total dissolution of the self in the other, but a process of disorientation of the consciousness which could catalyse an intellectual activation within the consciousness for the search of a new emancipatory orientation. This orientation lies in the formation of an intersubjective correlate: the experience of the self through the experience of the 'other'. (16) This is the process of displacement of the subject from its tradition of identification where an attempt is made to "live the difference in the identity". (17) Such a consciousness conveys a differentiating and identifying sense about the 'otherness'. I differentiate myself from the 'other' and in this differentiation I experience my possibilities through the 'other'. Thomas Mann has articulated this sense of 'otherness' in his Indian legend *The Transposed Heads* in a precarious manner:

The friendship between the two youths was based on the diversity in their I-and-my feelings, those of the one yearning towards those of the other. Incorporation, that is, makes for isolation, isolation for difference; difference makes for comparisons, comparisons give rise to uneasiness, uneasiness to wonderment, wonderment tends to admiration; and finally admiration turns to a yearning for mutual exchange and unity. Etad vai tad. That is that. And the doctrine applies especially in youth, when the clay of life is still soft and the I-and-my feelings not yet hardened into the conflicts of the single personality. (18)

The sense of 'otherness' is the basis of assimilation. Thus the encounter with the alien becomes a "yearning" for mutual exchange in diversity. But this yearning is not a unifying process. By obliterating the contours of my identity I am still not the "other", and yet I yearn to discover the 'other'. For the other must be discovered. It is a "neutral point", (19) as Todorov would put it, not in the sense of equidistance but in the sense that both, the self and the other, are experienced from within. "Without becoming an Indian, Gabeza de Vaca was no more the same old Spaniard." (20) This is how Todorov describes the "neutral point" which the Spanish coloniser reaches in his encounter with the culture of the American Indians. This is what I mean by the displacement of the subject from its tradition of identification and its perpetual unmaking. This experience of displacement would correspond to that of the modern exiled man, "a being who has lost his country without thereby acquiring another, who lives in a double exteriority". (21) The yearning for the 'other' will continue with innumerable stages and different degrees of assimilation. It will be a perpetual process. For every individual it will be a new encounter.

The modern European tradition of hermeneutics from Schleiermacher to Gadamer highlights the triadic structure of the hermeneutic process: understanding - interpretation - application, retracing the Platonic quest for "knowing

thysself". The history of the different national literatures of Europe and their understanding has been oriented within the framework of a "general European character" and been aimed at understanding the unicultural texts in a particular mother tongue. This Eurocentrist bias is also reflected in the hermeneutic category of the alterity propounded by Jauss. When Jauss speaks of alterity he has the historical 'otherness' of the medieval texts in mind.(22) For Jauss the hermeneutic category of alterity is primarily concerned with the overcoming of the historical distance between the old text and the contemporary reader in the presupposed continuity of the reader's identification with his cultural tradition. (23)

When Terry Eagleton observes that "the heights of modern English literature have been dominated by foreigners and emigres : Conrad, James, Eliot, Pound, Yeats, Joyce,"(24) he does not register the unicultural horizon of occidental culture, in which all these 'foreigners' are embedded. This 'foreign' element is comprehended in the sense of plurality and in that of homogeneity. The contributions of these 'foreigners' are essentially plural manifestations of the same cultural ethos of Europe.

My understanding of the hermeneutic category of alterity refers to the understanding of the 'heterogenous' other which is viewed "with alien eyes"(25) with the consciousness of rupture. But this relativist position does not show any indifference to the alien culture nor any renunciation of values. It is neither eclecticism nor comparitism. It is moreover a heterological understanding "which makes the difference of voices heard."(26) It is the prerequisite for the dialogue of cultures that characterizes our age, "a dialogue in which no one has the last word, in which neither voice is reduced to the status of a simple object and in which we gain advantages from our externality to the other."(27)

Notes

1. I have taken this term and some others from Jürgen Habermas who uses them in his *Kultur und Kritik* (Frankfurt/Main, 1973) and his keynote address "Können komplexe Gesellschaften eine verunfugte Identität ausbilden?" in D. Henrich and J. Habermas (eds.) *Zwei Reden* (Frankfurt/Main, 1974). The English translations of these terms are mine.

2. G.W.F. Hegel, "Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften", *Theorie Werkausgabe* (Frankfurt/Main, 1970), p. 430.

3. Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (New York, 1973), p. 30.

4. Cf. Raymond Williams, *Innovationen* (Frankfurt/Main, 1977), p. 88.

5. Habermas, *Zwei Reden*, p. 25.

6. Cf. *Zwei Reden*, p. 28.

7. Cf. *ibid.*

8. Cf. *ibid.*

9. Cf. *ibid.*
10. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 27.
11. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 29.
12. Cf. Tynjanov, "Literarische Evolution" (reprinted in German) in Philipp et al. (eds.), *Methoden- diskussion zur Theorie der Literatur : Ein Arbeitsbuch* (Frankfurt/Main, 1975), p. 146
13. This term is used by Raman Selden in connection with the complexity of literary texts in his *Criticism and Objectivity* (London, 1984), p. 96.
14. Cf. Dietrich Krusche, "Die Kategorie der Fremde" in Alois Wierlacher (ed.) *Fremdsprache Deutsch* Vol. I (Munich, 1980), pp. 47f.
15. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. R. Miller (London, 1975), p. 12.
16. Siegfried J. Schmidt, *Asthetizität : Philosophische Beiträge zur einer Theorie des Ästhetischen* (Munich, 1971), pp. 547f.
17. Tzvetan Todorov, *Die Eroberung Amerikas : Das Problem des Anderen*, trans. (German) Wilfried Bohringer (Frankfurt/Main, 1985), p. 294. English translation mine.
18. Thomas Mann, *The Transposed Heads : The Story of Sita* (London, 1941), p. 6.
19. Todorov, p. 294.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 295.
22. Cf. Hans Robert Jauss, *Zur Abgrenzung und Bestimmung einer literarischen Hermeneutik*, in *Text und Applikation*, p. 14.
23. Cf. Alois Wierlacher, *Mit fremden Augen, oder Fremdheit als Ferment: Überlegungen zur Begründung einer interkulturellen Hermeneutik deutscher Literatur*, in A. Wierlacher (ed.) *Das Fremde und das Eigene* (Munich, 1985), pp. 5, 18.
24. Terry Eagleton, *Exiles and Emigres : Studies in Modern Literature* (London, 1970), p. 9.
25. Wierlacher, *ibid.*
26. Todorov, p. 249.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 251.

Search for a Common Denominator: Western Structuralism and Indian Dhvani

Gurbhagat Singh

In the modern era, which means the period after the industrial revolution of Europe, two major views of literature and its value system have taken shape. One has been advocated by some thinkers like Goethe, Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot, Northrop Frye, and René Wellek. They have pushed the understanding of 'world literature' as a global monolithic system with an 'order' or 'tradition' projecting certain universals. It means that all literatures of the world manifest some common features which are similar to what Professor H. Greenberg, a well known linguist and ethnologist, in a paper on "Language Universals" calls "properties of human cultures which are found in all groups".(1)

If literary universals are 'common properties' which all cultures share, then we come very close to Nietzsche's concept of "recurrence" according to which the universe is made up of a finite number of power quanta and they keep recurring again and again in different civilizations. Even if we do not accept Nietzsche's recurrent power quanta of a metaphysical kind, we can still see a powerful drive up to the end of the nineteenth century to look for certain common features around which an identical perception and value system can be set up. After the decline of Christian *weltanschauung* the enlarging industrial class of Europe made an effort to advance its way of looking at things for welding the entire production system of the world within certain 'universal' or larger laws to develop an international market. Nietzsche's power quanta were not untainted by the needs of the expanding European industrialism functioning with the aim of maximum capital generation -- put by Nietzsche phenomenologically as "the death of God".

This kind of universalism, or the enthusiasm for locating some common features in all cultures, which was influenced by a certain historical situation of European culture specially by the urge for hegemony of the dominant class,

survived in the twentieth century also during and after the world wars, the reason being that the European intellectual looked for common bonds to save the regions of Europe threatened by certain irresolvable contradictions. Strangely enough, even in the post-Russian Revolution socialist societies, it was a universalist and global grand narrative of the world that developed.

As industrial civilization got established in Europe and the other Western parts of the globe along with science and technology, bringing prosperity and security although achieved by exploiting the markets of less developed and militarily weaker nations, a contextual way of looking at cultures also began to develop simultaneously. The earlier contextualists of culture were Vico and Herder. Vico, who lived in Italy from 1668 to 1744, suggested in his masterpiece *Scienza Nuova* that the Cartesian notion of truth and the pursuit for a universal paradigm were inadequate. Human beings and cultures can be understood only historically as each culture passes through a determinate stage of growth and decay. According to the prevalent stage all institutions of a society cohere into a pattern. Herder, who lived in Eastern Prussia from 1744 to 1803, challenged the idea that there exist some invariant laws or standards of consciousness or some aesthetic universals. In his now famous "Ideas for a Philosophy of History of Mankind" he suggested that each culture needs to be understood in relation to its milieu, its climate that 'promotes' a given course of development. (2)

The attacks of Vico and Herder, made on Cartesian universalism and the ideas of Enlightenment, during the eighteenth century, have bequeathed a vital legacy to the twentieth century contextualists of culture among whom the prominent ones who have developed a decisive relativistic method to understand cultures as wholes determined by their environment, traditions and local structures, are Sapir and Whorf, and their sympathetic interpreters like Franklin Fearing and Harry Hoijer. In the Vician and Herderian line, influenced by the later developments of Relativity, Marxism and ethnological research, they have emphasized that each culture has its own structural laws determined by its language, myth, history and geography. Therefore, no 'universals' or invariant laws, in the sense of being eternal structures exist. If the 'real world' of a group is built up on the unconsciously developed language habits of a group and if no two languages are similar, as Sapir says, then the experiences of each culture group will get organized uniquely. If each language has its own 'metaphysics' that determines the "thought world" of a people, as Whorf says, then the macrocosm is understood in terms of the inner microcosm i.e., an internal system of specific localized habits. This kind of thought has culminated in Foucault who has given the notice of an "episteme" or a common way of organizing things in an age that conditions a culture's consciousness and its value systems.

The universalist-Cartesian and the contextualist schools of understanding cultures look to be colliding head on, yet it is possible to discover a middle ground. The Sapir-Whorfian hypothesis of relativism peaking with a structuralist blend in Foucault's historical episteme is still valid to point out the specificity of each

culture, yet it is also not untrue either that there are certain power quanta that each culture repeats whether we want to understand them in the sense of Nietzsche or in the sense of Greenberg's universals based on the grammatical structures of languages. It looks that each culture in its relativity emphasizes certain features of understanding along with its 'oughts' and 'thou shalt nots' that are related partly to the period episteme and partly to the species-specificity of humans. Herder is still valid when he says that it is man as a species that in spite of climatic and other variations forms 'Humanitat' or certain common ways of dealing with life and the universe. It can be said that in each culture and according to the period and human specificity, certain features or power quanta are repeated. Therefore, even when some intellectual, experimental or other cultural structures look to be unique, they carry the general vital urge of human beings to evolve. This kind of dialectic of relativism and the repetition of power quanta based in species-specificity can be called *relative rechrony*. The suggestion is that no matter what the thrust of an intellectual or literary structure of any culture is, it is made up of a sign system that is *relative rechronic*. On the one hand it is determined by the epistemic needs of the historical phase of its genetic culture, and on the other fired by the species specific or general human aspirations that assert themselves for higher fulfilment in different contexts. We will now study two different critical systems from the standpoint of relative rechronics : Western Structuralism and Indian *dhvani*.

Structuralism became a force in different disciplines in the sixties, but it had made a beginning with Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* delivered in the form of lectures between 1907 and 1911. He presented language as a "self-contained whole" or a system of oppositions. It generates meanings from the function of differences. Though he divided the study of language into synchronic and diachronic, yet in his exposition and projection he concentrated on the synchrony. That is, in spite of his sensitivity to the change related or diachronic aspect of language he preferred to highlight language as an a-historical system with certain eternal categories like paradigm, syntagm, langue, parole etc.

If we look at the Europe of the first two decades of this century, especially the sharp and polarized contradictions of its capitalist economy, the competition of the various segments of the dominant Euro-class among themselves to capture the interests of the underdeveloped countries, the crisis of unmanageable production, society and its institutions appear to have lost their equilibrium. The first world war, the Russian Revolution, the nearly chaotic and disturbed conditions in Germany and Austria, were all symptomatic of a disequilibrium. In that context, as Terry Eagleton has also noted, (3) Saussure's a-historicity was an assertion to give the collapse in Europe some structures to restore its balance. Looked at from this angle, Saussure's view of language as a semiotic system, quite transcendent and a pure kind of structure, gets connected with the mainstream of Western thought system going back through Descartes to Plato. But what is important from our viewpoint in Saussure is that his system of language is rooted in a dialectic. On the one hand, it is a response to the Euro-crisis to overcome which

the system evolves an a-historical framework, and on the other, it repeats some perennial interests of Western culture, for instance, to know certain transcendental truths through a pure and rational meditative mind. Saussure brings language to be a transcendently assimilated system of differences that makes communication possible by imposing upon an undifferentiated continuum of experience a rational order. Though Saussure has bracketed off the subject, yet the assimilation of *langue* and its expression in *parole*, does not keep very far the subject of mind with an unconscious of rules. And for that reason Derrida has even called Saussure's theory "logocentric". The point is that Saussure's theory, while becoming a contextual epitome of its culture, further repeats a concern that is of general interest: how can the mind be an unconscious reservoir of a trans-subjective system?

Although Roman Jakobson began his activity in Russia around the same time and published his important work *Fundamentals of Language* much later (1956), he also continued with a similar quest. He suggested a structure of "distinctive features" that a listener knows to manipulate in communication. These features are oppositional and made up of polar sound like stressed (t) versus unstressed (d), nasalized versus non-nasalized, etc. The listener, if familiar with language, can correlate this opposition and his choice to a code at hand. Jakobson's notion of distinctive features and then the later given theory of the poetic sign as functioning for its own sake as a "palpable" sign in the axes of selection and combination ("Linguistics and Poetics", 1960), were another effort to define language and the aesthetic sign in a-historical terms as if the nearly revolutionary Russia and the chaotic Europe of the first three decades of the twentieth century were compelling him to pierce history and come up with some lasting and balancing structure. But at the same time he is also willing to grant that the use of language and its emphasis, metaphoric or metonymic, can shape, apart from other influences, certain specific "cultural patterns".⁽⁴⁾ It means that Jakobson's a-historical structures are not that insensitive to cultural history and experience. The mind's need for rationality to grasp cosmic structures that began with Plato and got strengthened in Descartes to the point of a dichotomous disaster, through Kant, phenomenology and Saussure, now comes in Jakobson in the form of a search for cosmic structures as embedded in the human brain.

Using the semiotic models of both Saussure and Jakobson with an absorption of Troubetsky's "phonological oppositions", Levi-Strauss has analysed cultures as synchronies. Though they evolve through history (diachrony), yet they are presential binaric systems which imitate cosmic structures through food habits, kinship and myths. He suggests that "myths should be analysed as a group of related myths which go through transformations like language". Finally, to him "myths signify the mind that evolves them by making use of the world of which it itself is a part." (*The Raw and the Cooked*). If we look deeper into Levi-Strauss's analysis of cultures, he appears to be in search of a common point where the cosmos, the mind and the world meet. Seen from this angle, Levi-Strauss is

still stuck to the bourgeois obsession for the origin. Although like other structuralists he asserts the human mind as disruption that functions like any vital energy of the universe and comes up with correlated complex systems, yet he also reminds a thinker of the post-war Western hemisphere that is concerned about the separation of the mind, the cosmos and the world, leading to contemporary disasters. But he tries to lessen this separation by flashing the originary unity.

When Michael Riffaterre in his *Semantics of Poetry* elaborates a poetic text as "a closed entity" (5) modelled on a hypogram which is a kind of effect of the words organized in a poetic line to reflect the presuppositions of the matrix or the key word that keeps appearing in the text in its variants or ungrammaticalities, he is also deliberative in ascertaining certain features of the poetic text as a metaphor of informational sciences, apart from explaining the complexity of the poetic text and sign a little more adequately, also reflects the multi-national post-modern era in which, as both Jameson and Lyotard agree, the post-industrial ruling class needs informatics and its advance in various spheres to keep its hegemony intact.(6) In a way, Riffaterre's cybernetic approach gets connected with the post-modern politics of hegemony that keeps the question of cultural semantics fully repressed. But still Riffaterre's success in explaining the textual significance and the reader's transformational praxis through this cybernetic kind of complexity cannot be denied.

Structuralism, thus, cannot be separated from the problematics of Western culture. It is specially rooted in the twentieth century insecurity of the Western societies ridden with the contradictions and conflicts of capitalism but at the same time afloat in prosperity and its genetic depersonalizing of the multi-national and technocratic network. While responding to its specific cultural problematic, structuralism has also come up with certain spatial categories based on the repeated concerns in crisis that are sharable. Levi-Strauss's and Roman Jakobson's binarism and Riffaterre's hypogrammatic model cross their cultural boundaries and transcend the moments to which they have responded.

The Indian system of *dhvani* was formulated by two philosopher-aestheticists of Kashmir. Anandavardhana, who flourished between 855 and 883 A.D. during the reign of king Avantivarmana, developed this theory in his well known treatise *Dvanyaloka*. And Abhinavagupta, who enlarged and reinterpreted it in his work *Locana*, peaked in his literary activity from 990 to 1015 A.D. Anandavardhana has suggested that a poem is made up of suggestion or *dhvani*. This suggestion is a subtle poetic meaning that is different from denotative (*abhidha*), sentential (*tatparya*) and metaphoric (*laksana*) meanings.

It is *vyangyārtha* or a kind of indirection that transcends denotative, sentential and metaphoric meanings. Rather, denotation and metaphor become subordinated to suggestion. *Dhvani*, then, is further classified into *avivakṣitavācya*, in which *śabda* or the word of intonation suggests, and *vivakṣitanyaparavācya*, in which *ārtha* or meaning suggests, though in both the categories *śabda* and *ārtha* also co-operate at the same time.(7) Abhinavagupta enlarged Anandavardhana's

theory of *dhvani* by suggesting that *dhvani* is predominantly *rasa-dhvani* or the suggestion of an aesthetic emotional relish. It incorporates the suggestions that rise from *vastu* or thought and *alamkara* or metaphor. Abhinavagupta also made it clear that *dhvani* is an experience of the reader, it is not perception or inference.(8) It is an incredible miracle or *alaukika camatkara*.

All modern historians of *dhvani* like S.K. Dey, A. Sankaran and K. Krishna Moorthy agree that the theory of *dhvani* was a literary transfer of the notion of *sphota* from a school of grammarians that had existed before Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta. The *sphota* was elaborated as an invisible sound like the soul that is suggested by the last letter of a word together with the impressions of the experiences of the previous sounds. A. Sankaran calls it the real seat of the significative capacity.(9) This soul like indivisible or subtle sound that explodes on the reader from the word, defined from the grammarians is not the only connection of *dhvani* with the tradition. K. Krishnamoorthy takes it back even to Bhartrhari's *Vakyapadia* and Bharavi's work, written in the 6th century A.D., in which Siva's cosmic form has been mentioned as *dhvani*.(10) *Dhvani*, thus, becomes related to or an evolved form of the traditional doctrine of the External Verbum or "*sabdabrahmavada*".

In fact in Abhinavagupta's *Locana*, *dhvani* is also described as *antyabuddhi-nirgrahya* or an internally audible sound like *nada*.(11) And *nada* we know was the Unstruck Melody that the Buddhist yogis aspired to hear. *Dhvani's* analogy with the *nada*, and on the other hand with the invisible soul or *Atma* reveals that the *dhvanikars* were working with both Buddhist and Hindu systems simultaneously, although their sect loyalties remained to a variety of Kashmir Saivism known as *Pratyabhijan* school. It believed in realizing one's identity with Siva and the universe through self-recognition and not in the course of "fantastic external and internal conduct or discipline". Anandavardhana has even used the word "*Pratyabhijneyan*" that K. Krishnamoorthy translates into "should be recognized".(12) Anandavardhana has used this word in which both Buddhist and Hindu notions of removing ignorance through *jnana* permeate, to stress an ought for the poet to create *dhvani*-involving structures and an ought for the reader to the *dhvani* that floods the poem like light, *Atma* or *Brahma*. Both the poet and the reader for *dhvani* are *sahridayas* : the men of taste and genius.

Dhvani, thus understood, cannot be separated from India's perennial quest for the Buddhist *Nirvana* or the Hindu *Moksha*. The literary text as a means to self-recognition leading to liberation was explained by the *dhvanikars* by remaining part of the intellectual and philosophical tradition of India. Their synthesis through *dhvani* was necessitated for certain other reasons as well. The feudal set up in Kashmir was cracking. In fact, Avantivarmana under whose patronage Anandavardhana flourished, had succeeded in establishing peace after a long time of conflicts and tensions of the ruling hierarchies of Kashmir. And Abhinavagupta's time that was about 150 years later than that of Anandavardhana, was marked by uncertainty and disturbance. Apart from the need for

renewal of the Nirvanic and Mokshuk theme to tide over the contemporary uncertainty, there was the geo-physical power of the valley also that could have influenced the *dhvanikars* to produce such complex aesthetic-philosophical works in which logic and mysticism met. Dr Al-Hajj G.M.D.Sufi who wrote a wonderful book on the history of Kashmir, entitled *Kashir*, has very candidly described the impact of Kashmir's environment on the mind of its native : "That the Kashmiri is essentially mystical and imaginative, those who have known him intimately and closely will admit. His environment has made him so. Huge peaks, flowing silvery and sublime solitude have induced this frame of mind."(13)

The critique of an ideal and liberative poem, developed in the *dhvani* system, is not only a culmination of the traditional Buddhist and Hindu *darsana* in a Saivite view of liberation through self-recognition and luminosity, it is also a meditative and concentrative response to the valley's empowered geo-physical environment. Still the philosophical and aesthetic assertions made are shareable and trans-contextual.

Both structuralism and Indian *dhvani* have emerged from their cultural contexts and within them they are high intellectual moments but what deserves our attention is that they make their assertions in response to the structural crises of their cultures.

Structuralism has responded to the contradictions and uncertainty let loose by the advanced capitalism of the West, and Indian *dhvani* has responded to the exertion of feudal structures causing havoc to the society at large. Influenced by their environments and the indigenous intellectual traditions both the systems peak in contextuality, but the same peaking let them come up with certain structures that can help their readers survive the crises knowledgeably. Structuralism leads to the recognition of the meeting point of the mind, the cosmos and the society; and *dhvani* to the identity of consciousness, Siva and the universe. They postulate critical values within their contexts but since the deepened contextuality takes them to the fundamentals of survival and evolution, what they assert becomes sharable and trans-contextual simultaneously. This dialectical quality of intense contextualisation and at the same time touching the fundamentals from a new and contemporaneous angle, make these systems both specific and universalistic. The dialectical quality appears in all critical or other systems which respond to their cultural crises. In fact that is what makes them systems. This repetition of fundamentals of life or power quanta in the Nietzschean sense during moments of intense crisis can be called relative rechrony as suggested above. A comparative study of critical or literary systems is to be a study in relative rechronics - a sub-system to analyse the dialectical condition in which the deepened contextuality generates certain values that are sharable and trans-contextual simultaneously.

Notes

1. Answar S. Dil (ed.). *Language, Culture and Communication : Essays by H. Greenberg* (Stanford, 1971), p. 295.
2. J.G. Herder, "Ideas for a Philosophy of History", in F.M. Barnard (ed.), *J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 291.
3. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory* (3rd edn. : Oxford, 1985), p. 110.
4. Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague, 1956), p. 90.
5. Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (London, 1978), pp. 2-3.
6. See Sections 8 & 11 of J.F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition : A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Bria Massumi (rptd. : Manchester, 1986); also Fredric Jameson's Foreword.
7. A Sankaran, *Some Aspects of Literary Criticism in Sanskrit* (2nd edn : New Delhi, 1973), p. 69.
8. K. Krishnamoorthy, *Dhvanyaloka and Its Critics* (2nd edn. : Delhi & Varanasi, 1968), p. 219.
9. Sankaran, p. 65.
10. Krishnamoorthy, p. 33.
11. Krishnamoorthy, p. 35.
12. Krishnamoorthy, p. 228.
13. G.M.D. Sufi, *Kashir : A History of Kashmir* (rptd. : New Delhi, Jammu, Rohtak, Lucknow, 1974), p. 19.

Cultural Relativism and Perspective :

Naipaul, Chaudhuri and Forster

Jasbir Jain

The concept of cultural relativism is opposed to the idea of cultural universalism. It recognizes the fact that there are different cultural traits and conditions which influence a particular people; that value judgements are not necessarily involved in the recognition of these differences. Cultural relativism also assumes or should assume an element of respect for the differences existing among cultures. In political terms it could be translated as "separate but equal", as Burke had viewed the claim for freedom on the part of Americans. In line with this Burke also viewed the "Hindoo" civilization as one which needed to be treated on its own terms. (1) By and large the whole concept of the white man's burden is based on the idea of cultural universalism, on the belief that less civilized societies need to evolve in order to come up to the level of the West. Such a view fails to take into account the fact that cultural differences are visible even amongst people speaking the same language, having access to the same literature, and at times inhabiting the same geographical area. They are also apparent within the same society. It is common enough now to talk of high culture and popular culture, of assimilation and absorption, of societies as melting pots and of immigrant and ethnic stances. There is a move towards decolonization of cultures in former colonies accompanied by a desire to discover, know and promote their own cultures. There is also, as George Steiner has pointed out, the extraterritoriality of some writers. (2)

Cultural relativism thus moves away from universalist and evolutionary theories; it also moves away from imperialist stances, and takes into account the opposition and strife within and between cultures. By rejecting a monolithic view of culture it gives an increased importance to the ways of relating to a culture whether one's own or someone else's. It is but natural that in this relationship it

is the individual who is important, and the individual's idea of his own self. The essential part of this relationship is the self-world polarity which pulls the individual into two different directions, one the need and desire to relate to other cultures, and the other to preserve his own. This is further crystallized in the need to hold on to a strong sense of the self. It is this which enables one to see the importance of exiles, vagrants and rebels to their own society, as Raymond Williams proceeds to do in *Culture and Society*. (3) Lionel Trilling in his essay "Freud: Within and Beyond Culture" writes :

For literature, as for Freud, the test of culture is always the individual self, not the other way round. The function of literature, through all its mutations, has been to make us aware of the particularity of selves, and the high authority of the self in its quarrel with its society and its culture. (4)

In literary artefacts, this quarrel is enacted in terms of protest, existential anguish, pain, suffering, confession and often bewilderment. The writer/narrator's point of view, his vision of reality as he sees it becomes important to the value of that literature. This relationship between the self and society forms an archetypal paradigm for relationships with other cultures. How the self relates to society is very often a spatial one--as to where the self is placed--the "strategic location" of the self. There can be various approaches, but here my concern is with two--mainly the outsider's view--which may be further classified as that of an alien or an expatriate, and the insider's view which may be further subdivided into the subjective and the objective.

These approaches are, in the final instance, ways and means of understanding one's own self and can ordinarily be placed within an existential framework of an I-Thou relationship, and are attempts at understanding the nature of reality. For the purposes of illustrating how these approaches work I have selected Naipaul's *Area of Darkness* (1964), and Nirad Chaudhuri's *The Continent of Circe* (1965), for both are about India and Indians and deal with the early sixties. Further, both writers are unable to get away from Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924). This also allows me to examine - though not in detail - the expatriate's approach to his ancestral culture, as well the alienation of the immigrant in Naipaul's work, the native alien, or the critical insider's view who can distance himself in the view of Chaudhuri, and the foreigner's view in the work of Forster, manifested through a fictional form. The choice of a genre by the writers themselves indicates the framework they wish to adopt, and also serves a purpose where their creative and psychological needs are concerned.

For the purpose of my analysis I am equating text with culture - and work on the assumption that the hermeneutic model can be used for relating to both. Only in this case the hermeneutic approach does not consist of the three phases described by Gadamer as understanding - interpretation - and application, but of the four as outlined by Steiner namely surrender, appropriation, interpretation and restoration of balance.(5)

Naipaul, in *An Area of Darkness*, adopts the format of a travelogue, a format he had adopted earlier and was to adopt often enough in later years. A travelogue is outwardly a recording of events, of physical details and empirically verifiable reality. It has two major advantages - the writer/narrator needs no intermediary, and the journey often acquires symbolical dimensions. Twenty years after *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul confesses in his foreword to *Finding the Centre* (1984) how this world of facts overawed him. It constrained him and when it came to the writing, he admits that he did not know what value to attach to the traveller's 'I'. "This kind of direct participation came awkwardly to me, and the literary problem was also partly a personal one." (6) He solved the problem partly by being a looker-on, by being interested in landscape, history and people, and partly by surrendering himself to the experience:

To travel was glamorous, But travel also made unsuspected demands on me as a man and a writer, and perhaps for that reason it soon became a necessary stimulus for me. It broadened my world view: it showed me a changing world and took me out of my colonial shell; it became the substitute for the mature social experience - the deepening knowledge of a society - which my background and the nature of my life denied me. My uncertainty about my role withered; a role was not necessary. I recognized my own instincts as a traveller, and was content to be myself, to be what I had always been, a looker. And I learned to look in my own way. (*Finding the Centre*, 11)

Naipaul's journey to India is an attempt to understand his own self, and also to exercise the presence of the mythical India of his ancestral heritage. The actual journey takes place after he has experienced India through the transplanted society in Trinidad, and has read about it in books. He has had a long relationship with India through the world of his imagination. India, Naipaul writes, "was the country from which my grandfather came, a country never physically described and therefore never real", (7) it was "an area of imagination". In fact, what he had come in search of were two different Indias - one to which he could relate as an outsider, outside the fold of customs, manners and language, and the other which he wished to discover and relate to as a result of his isolation in London.

An Indian identity, Naipaul realized, was easy to come by but difficult to adopt. It was not acceptable to him for it failed to recognize his individuality. The Indianness which had made him distinctive in England and Trinidad, now at once denied him this very distinctiveness. In Bombay, when he entered a shop or a restaurant and awaited a special quality of response, there was nothing :

It was like being denied part of my reality. Again and again I was caught. I was faceless. I might sink without a trace into that Indian crowd. I had been made by Trinidad and England; recognition of my difference was necessary to me. I felt the need to impose myself and didn't know how. (8)

Naipaul's future relationship with India was to be governed by this. India threatened his identity, therefore all he could do was to reject it. Everything else falls into place. Thence onwards he was to assume the role of a visitor, and resist participation for fear of being absorbed into it. This journey and all succeeding journeys to India were to follow a pattern, to become attempts to come to terms with his own self in terms of time, space and existence, and attempts to refute all that India stood for.

Although his encounter with India was not an innocent one, yet nothing he had known about India had prepared him for the actual reality. Neither his experience of the Indian society in the West Indies, nor the books he had read. The non-Indian communities had been outside his ken. He describes how the world of his home and that of his social existence were mutually exclusive worlds which were kept apart and stayed apart. He writes:

It is a marvel that we should have accepted the separateness of our two worlds and seen no incongruity in their juxtaposition. In one world we existed as if in blinkers, as if seeing no more than my grandfather's village; outside we were totally self-aware. (9)

It is this schizophrenic division which he wants to bridge, if not by uniting the two worlds then by discarding one of them. Therefore he is afraid of any involvement which may destroy him. The journey to India is a journey backward in time, towards his own ancestral home, his grandfather's village, his poor relatives and his final withdrawal from them. Like George and Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* he has to destroy this mythical claim on his psyche before he succumbs to it. This rejection of India is a step towards his own freedom, a solution to the problem of his being. It is also a means of overcoming the limitations of space because it confirms him in his extraterritoriality. Once it is acknowledged that he himself incorporates all spatial aspects, he is removed from the threat of homelessness. Now onwards he is the perpetual traveller.

Without realizing Naipaul achieves what his grandfather had achieved, but by a different route. His grandfather, he feels, had ceased to see as soon as he had left India, "He had abandoned India; and ... he denied Trinidad. Yet he walked on solid earth. Nothing beyond his village had stirred him; nothing had forced him out of himself, he carried his village with him." (10) Like him, Naipaul also carried his self with him. Only he sees the outer reality too closely and brutally rather than not at all and thus deny it a hold over him.

Naipaul sees India with all its foolishness and 'incongruities', the rules that can be violated, the 'muddle' on his arrival, the poverty, the squalor, the exploitative tendencies of his relatives, the lies which Aziz tells, the mixed life-style of the Westernized group, the superficial external veneer. All this is visible to the outsider. And all this, Naipaul admits, even Gandhi was able to see by virtue of having acquired an outsider's view :

He looked at India as no Indian was able to; his vision was direct, and his directness was revolutionary. He sees exactly what the

visitor sees; he does not ignore the obvious.... He sees the Indian callousness, the Indian refusal to see. No Indian attitude escapes him, no Indian problems; he looks down to the roots of the static, decayed society. (11)

Even if Naipaul can get away from India, he cannot get away from Gandhi. He returns to him in *India : A Wounded Civilization* (1977). In a whole section titled "A Defect of Vision", he comments upon the inward preoccupation of Gandhi and indifference to landscape and people during his years in England and in Africa. Gandhi, Naipaul feels, does not attempt to relate to his surroundings, and *My Experiments with Truth* is about an inner crisis of identity. Recording his own response he writes :

There is no attempt at an objective view of the world. As events pile up, the reader begins to be nagged by the absence of the external world, when the reader ceases to share or follow Gandhi's conviction, he can begin to feel choked.(12)

This inward concentration Naipaul considers to be characteristic of most Indians. Falling back on Sudhir Kakar's theory of the underdeveloped ego, he hastens to generalize that "Indians are immersed in their experiences in a way that Western people can seldom be. It is less easy for Indians to withdraw and analyse." (13) In this context Gandhi's indifference to outer reality in the earlier half of his life is taken to be symbolic of the average Indian's escape into his personal memory of the country's past. It is perhaps this mistaken attempt to resurrect that "fantasy of wholeness and purity" (14) which confuses the present, and explains to Naipaul India's failure to come to terms with external reality. Perhaps in order to avoid a similar fate he wants to reject this part of his past, to destroy the attraction it has had for him.

While Naipaul chooses the outsider's role to interpret India and Indian culture, and adopts a pose of distancing primarily in order to preserve his self, Chaudhuri adopts a different stance and a different purpose. *The Continent of Circe* casts its net wide in terms of time and history. Subtitled "An Essay on the Peoples of India" it is a journey into the past--a country's past and at once places itself outside the framework of a traveller's subjective response. Chaudhuri's purpose is to study the Indian people, their historical continuity, the patterns of their literature and analyse their present problems. The external pattern is like that in Nehru's *Discovery of India* (15) though the approach is different. Chaudhuri proceeds to analyse the reasons for the asceticism of Indians and the Hindu withdrawal from the world of external reality, the supreme indifference to poverty and squalor. He provides a counterview to Naipaul's observations at every level. Indians yearn for the fullness of the glorious past and for the lost *Ramrajya* because of a need for respectability, because of their need to sustain the self. This also accounts for their withdrawal from external reality, although it does not justify this obsession with the past. In Chaudhuri's view this is an obsession which needs to be overcome. India's past has been made larger than life by the European Orientalists who

"pieced together a picture of India from Sanskrit and other texts, and tried to represent the Hindu order as a coherent system, with a logic of its own." But from the first this interpretation remained "a purely literary creation ... an abstraction in the literary dimension, with no necessary relation to anything that existed in fact ...". (16) The European idealists also sought to invest India with the moral romanticism of nineteenth century Europe : "The Hindu spirituality of which the West spoke was the creation of a Western spiritual necessity, and was not to be found in India either in books or among men." (17)

The opposition between the Orient and the Occident was a creation of the West, an attempt at cultural domination, as Edward Said has pointed out much more emphatically and at greater length in *Orientalism* . Said writes :

The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of the European material civilization and culture Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the "Orient" and (most of the time) the "Occident". (18)

While this view supported European culture, it constrained the development of the people of the Orient, as it involved them in an inverted move in time.

This necessitates a closer look at the concept of cultural relativism. Is cultural relativism taken to imply only the relationship and interdependence between cultures and between individuals and cultures, or does it include a change in perspective? While William Jones and his group advocated a greater understanding of Indian culture through a study of its literature and languages, the political supporters of this movement considered it a means to a better and more efficient administration. This relationship was within the framework of cultural superiority. The perspective did not assume equality at all. When Burke in his impassioned speeches in the House of Lords during the trial of Warren Hastings drew attention to Indian culture, he placed it on a more equal footing. His view implied that the attempt should not be at reform, alteration or violation of the Indian social and legal system, but at giving them the freedom to work within their system. Pointing out that the people of India were different in customs and manners, he emphasized the difficulties and the dangers of the interaction :

If we undertake to govern the inhabitants of such a country, we must govern them upon their principles and maxims, and not upon ours. We must not think to force them into the narrow circle of our ideas; we must extend ours to take in their system of opinions and rites, and the necessities which result from both ... it is we who must conform. (19)

Not adequate attention has been paid to Burke and his views related to India. They are of a piece with his views on the American question and his views on the moral principles of government. Morality to him was not a matter of geographical

location or of political convenience. The mutuality of interaction is stressed by him. But this mutuality was missing in the West's attitude towards the Orient. Cultural relativism depends on this basis of equality which is basic to its meaning.

Nirad Chaudhuri, in his view of India's past, is able to see the need of getting rid of the myth of the glorious past if men have to change the direction of their relationship to their own culture. He is ahead of Naipaul in that he does not see it merely as a personal need, but one more wide-based. His "strategic location" is inside the culture, not outside it as happens to be in Naipaul's case. Also the framework he employs is of placing the Aryan attitudes within the conventional approach of impartial colonizers where prejudices related to colour and race are important. (Naipaul, fully aware of his Brahmin origins, talks of caste, but not of colour and race.) And it is within this framework of political colonization that the reasons for the schizophrenic split becomes clear. The Hindus are quite capable of a "double consciousness, each complete and coherent, but capable of shutting out the other when one is dominant". (*Circe*, p. 277) This is in part a strategy of stemming the intrusion of other cultures and in part a result of the polarity of their world. It is both a strength and a weakness. Naipaul had experienced this in his own house, during his childhood, but is unable to relate it to his own experience in India. This division sustains the 'self' but divides the world to which it can relate, it becomes a barrier to a direct encounter with the reality of the present. One major difference between Chaudhuri's approach and that of Naipaul is that of perspective. Chaudhuri, by trying to analyse and understand the causes of this withdrawal, is willing to think of ways and means of overcoming it. Naipaul, as an outsider, is relieved to get out of it.

In the final part of *An Area of Darkness* Naipaul turns to the lurking colonial presence in India, visible in its buildings, monuments, lifestyles and cultures. The magnified presence of the British felt right from Kipling to Forster still lingers on in an independent country. Naipaul comments upon the use of the word 'British' by 'Adele' in *A Passage to India*. (20) The word as used by Adele does not carry merely a geographical connotation, it conveys a whole way of behaviour. It is identifiable with a power structure, and the incongruous imposition of a ruling class. Chaudhuri also turns to Forster (21) and referring to his plea for putting the Indo-British relations on a human footing, comments that it is a "tropicalized" version of compassion.

I would like to consider briefly Forster's depiction of cultural relativity and the significance of his fictional perspective which allows itself more freedom than the ones adopted by Naipaul and Chaudhuri. The novel is divided into three parts—the British, the Muslim and the Hindu. The subtitles Mosques, Caves, Temple are misleading as to perspective. There are border areas in each part inhabited by intruders and outsiders, but the central point of gravity is not lost. There are clashes, encounters and divisions in almost all three sections, and there are undercurrents. If Fielding seems to relate more comfortably to Aziz, Mrs Moore has some of Godbole's intuitive powers. The novel, no matter how often

explored, provides limitless possibilities at every reading. My concern here is with the problem of cultural relativism and Forster's approach to it. Forster's approach to culture is more impersonal and pragmatic than that of the other two writers. He is not in search of a personal 'self'. Thus the rules of the game are fairly clear to him. In order to understand an alien culture--like Fielding wants to do--one has to shed a part of one's own; it involves participation [detachment or withdrawal is no answer], as well as sacrifice. It may imply a degree of moral uncertainty as the well-established practices of one's own culture are questioned. It is likely to mean isolation and a moving away from the group. Unless one is prepared for this, there is no point in making the effort. Other cultures are like mirrors, they reflect our own limitations. They provide comparisons and compel us to shift our stand, but the basic need is one of participation.

Forster also points out that there are likely to be differences in the concept of honour, of politeness, of religious practices, and in degrees of social closeness permitted by different cultures. Attention to these is important. Mrs Moore remembers to take off her shoes when visiting the mosque, but Adele commits the mistake of asking Aziz as to how many wives he has. Aziz, in his own turn, resurrects his dead wife temporarily in order to extend hospitality to the foreigners. The slender basis of understanding between different people can easily be destroyed by distrust or suspicion or falsehood. When this happens, the results are disastrous. Mrs Moore leaves India only to die on her way home, Godbole and Aziz escape to a princely state, Fielding and Adele leave for England. When Fielding returns to India, he realises that there is no meeting-ground between him and Aziz. Though this appears frightening in human terms, it makes sound common sense in political and cultural terms. It is an acceptable solution even in psychological terms. No relationship can be a promising one if the very basis is an unequal one. Then it implies condescension and domination and threatens the 'self'. And the 'self' is a necessary prerequisite to any relationship--cultural or personal.

This relationship of the 'self' with culture needs to be approached at two levels--one, the 'self' in relationship to one's own culture, and this would be a basis for all ethnic studies; the other, of the 'self' in relationship to other cultures, this should be a basis for intercultural studies. In the first, the awareness of the 'self' is important in order to understand, to transmit and to question the cultural value structure. The self in opposition to the culture of its time alone imparts it a quality of dynamism. If this is not so it can be seduced and rendered inactive (as Chaudhuri's *The Continent of Circe* elaborates upon this). In relationship to other cultures the 'self' is an important requisite along with respect and the assumption of equality. An active relationship is bound to have existential dimensions, and is likely to take the form of an opposition between the two, or at least a distancing which may project the reality in a more sharply defined manner. Lionel Trilling, perhaps alone among the cultural critics, recognised the need for this opposition in clear cut terms. After having discussed this in his essays in *The Liberal*

Imagination and The Opposing Self, he turned to it once again in *Beyond Culture*, writing this time on Freud. Referring to Freud, Trilling elaborated on the cultural influences on the self. Freud made it clear :

how the culture suffuses the remotest parts of the individual's mind, being taken in almost literally with the mother's milk. His psychology involves culture in its very essence--it tells us that the surrogates of culture are established in the mind itself, that the development of the mind recapitulates the development of culture. (22)

Trilling also points out the awareness which Freud put forward of man as biological fact. This awareness sets a man against his surroundings, and makes it possible for human will to effect a change, liberate itself from culture (or cultures). This belief suggests that there is :

a residue of human quality beyond the reach of cultural control, and that this residue of human quality, elemental as it may be, serves to bring culture itself under criticism and keeps it from being absolute. (23)

Thus the way to relate to other cultures needs to begin from the self, its human quality, its questioning, and a communication much above the normal level of acceptance or rejection. Perhaps it need not be a move towards integration, but one towards a necessary tension .

Notes

1. Edmund Burke, *The Works of Edmund Burke*, 8 volumes (London: Bohn's British Classics, 1845-89), Vol. VII, pp.42-44. Also refer David Kopf's *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, (Calcutta: Firma K.L.M., 1969) for a detailed survey.

2. George Steiner, *Extraterritorial* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), pp.14-21.

3. Lionel Trilling, *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1966), p.103.

4. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961). See pp.203-210 and pp.279 ff.

5. Steiner, *After Babel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 1977, 296 ff.

6. V.S.Naipaul, *Finding the Centre* (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1985), p.11.

7. V.S.Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness* (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1964), p.29

8. *Ibid*, p.48.

9. *Ibid*, p.38.

10. *Ibid*, p.32.
11. *Ibid*, p.77.
12. V.S. Naipaul, *India: A Wounded Civilization* (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1979) .
13. *Ibid*, p.183.
14. *Ibid*, p.149.
15. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Delhi,1946).
16. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Continent of Circe* (Bombay: Jaico,1983), p.97.
17. *Ibid*, p.98.
18. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul,1978), pp.1-2.
19. Burke, p.43.
20. Naipaul (London,1964), p.206.
21. Chaudhuri, p.69 & p.146.
22. Trilling, p.105.
23. *Ibid*, p.113.

Cultural Relativism and Tamil Fiction

with special reference to Sivasankari's *Bridges*

C. T. Indra

Tamil Fiction has taken great strides in the post-war period and it has shown a serious preoccupation with the changing value systems. Cultural hegemony and homogeneity have been eroded by changes in ways of life necessitated by the flux of time as well as by forces of westernization brought in by urbanization and industrialization. The microcosmic unit of a self-contained village has been broken, leading its people towards congested cities and multi-storied metropolis. Communication networks and democratization have facilitated the loosening of insular ties. The rural has been replaced by the urban in every aspect. This has forced the people to change their habits and customs. The bastion of orthodoxy has been invaded, and conquered. It is in this context that many recent works of Tamil fiction have to be studied and interpreted. They are best understood as so many studies in cultural relativism in a developing, changing society. Let us, however, define what we mean by cultural relativism in general and in the Indian context in particular.

Cultural relativism can be broadly looked at from two points of view : one *spatial*, the other *temporal*. It is spatial when we say that there is no universally accepted means of evaluation--distinguishing between what is good and what is bad--and that each society must be judged in terms of the values it cherishes. That is, though relativism is dependent on forms of culture, they differ from place to place and values are to be related to habits, customs and the principles upon which their forms are based. It is temporal when we see how within one and the same culture or place the values change as times change. The concern here, in this paper, is chiefly with the latter. Again cultural relativism may be examined in the Indian context, temporally speaking, from the point of view of the individual and from the point of view of the society in which he is placed. For the Indian tradition

has accepted the principle of relativism in the individuals according to their development so that no two individuals need follow the same pattern of behaviour. And the evolving society will necessarily be constituted both by those who conform to established values and those who feel inwardly compelled to conform to their own inner laws. As Sri Aurobindo points out in *Foundations of Indian Culture*, ancient Indian culture has believed that absolutism can and does subsume relativism. There has never been a conflict between the two. Since the tradition it laid down was based on the principle of 'sanatanadharmā' (eternal 'dharma'), which respected 'svabhava' and 'svadharma', we may not be wrong in viewing even the sequential changes our culture has undergone as sanctioned by such a 'dharma'. Significantly enough, our value system laid down the principle of 'adhikaratatva'--that each individual should be allowed to act and follow the life for which he was fitted. For example, the 'dharma' that bound an ordinary 'grhastha' (householder) did not bind a Yajñavalkya, Janaka or Sankara, when he chose, happily and spontaneously, to leave the society and seek 'jnana' (truth). Similarly collective prayer was intended for individuals only when cohesion was natural. The individual had the freedom to pursue his own form of worship. However, it must be remembered that relativity should not be construed as 'doing as one likes', a licence to act according to one's whims and fancies. When there was such flexibility and freedom within an absolute system there was no scope for resistance leading to a threat of dissolution or alienation. Indeed alienation was an un-Indian concept. But that does not mean that it was a rigid, stratified culture. Relativity at the temporal level raises the question whether it is merely a change of forms or an attempt to repudiate values which might be eternal though the forms they assume may be temporal. While Indian culture has recognized 'sanatanadharmā', it has also recognized 'yugadharmā' which prevails in a given epoch and which may vary from generation to generation.

II

An attempt is made in this paper to define the attitude to values that emerges in a Tamil novel by a leading writer Sivasankari who has put the very motif of cultural relativism at the heart of her work. In the last ten years she has developed into a purposeful and forceful writer fulfilling Leavis's conception of the writer as a barometer sensitively registering the changes that affect the immemorial ways of life. She has particularly evinced interest in how the loosening of cultural ties and the weakening of traditional stress on discipline have affected the young.. In some of her works she has even chosen to make use of fiction to create an awareness of immediate social problems which are pernicious, which she fears will wreck an intrinsically strong culture if the trend is not stemmed. We recall how while in our country Chinua Achebe's works starting from *Things Fall Apart* have received so much critical attention as critiques of cultural relativism, the

same preoccupation presented with admirable technical finesse and authenticity in regional literature has not evoked comparable critical response. The aim of this paper is to highlight the significant achievement of Sivasankari who has used fictional form most happily as a critic of culture. In many of her works she has addressed herself to this issue, but in the novel *Bridges* (1983) she has achieved an epic dimension and pursued her theme with an unrelenting tenacity. The very narrative is structured in terms of their motif in a novel manner. There is no coherent narrative, in the sense of a well-defined plot. The author herself says it is a strategic stringing of episodes meant to dramatize specific customs and rituals and values and the changing attitudes to them. The novel, at one level, is a meticulous documentation of authentic details--the result of a research into a community's past. In the process it also becomes at once a brilliant recreation of a past way of life which is almost dead and a felicitous rendering of contemporary life-rhythm and speech rhythm. It is a subtle and balanced appraisal of a community's struggle to accommodate modernity and assimilate it into an already rich tradition which had been ossified. The novel reflects the dilemmas and tensions of a community which has been steadily moving away from an insular, provincial culture, to a more and more cosmopolitan sphere. In depicting this, Sivasankari has encompassed an incredibly wide spectrum of its customs, mores and intellect.

The structure of the novel is so designed as to help the reader 'realize' the motif of cultural relativism. It is tripartite in principle i.e. it deals with three generations and therefore three time scales (1907-31, 1940-64, 1965-85), ending in 1998; it sets its locales in three places which are typical of a village/provincial town, city and metropolis; it enacts its drama in terms of the lives of three families. It thus practically covers the whole of the twentieth century and shifts its beam back and forth from a Tanjore village to the city of Madras, to the metropolis, Pune, Delhi or Bombay. The apparent purpose seems to be to present different generations as in Galsworthy's *Forsythe Saga* or Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*. But the central creative impulse seems to be different : to take up the changing attitudes to life with regard to given rituals and ways of life, followed by different generations. The milieu is a typical Brahmin family of the Tanjore stock. The central preoccupation is with some of the major Hindu sacraments in such families : upanayanam, attaining puberty, marriage, conception, birth and death--each an initiation into the meaning and purpose of life at different stages.

The novel boldly employs the technique of parallelism and contrast--surface contrasts become parallelisms and parallelisms become deep contrasts. In order to underscore this point the novelist has studiously avoided sequential narration and has throughout chosen to juxtapose the past and the present. In other words the story of one generation, say the oldest, is never related at one stretch; it is interwoven with the other two, creating a distinct pattern. Sometimes on a given theme the chronologically later story of the third generation overtakes the first or the second. The effect of this criss-crossing narration is to bring our impressions

of the three different generations as closely as possible, to achieve a simultaneity in perception, by collapsing time and telescoping space--in short to present spatially what is temporal. This gives a kaleidoscopic effect to the whole novel. We feel that values and customs change as times change and the attitudes of parents and children change from generation to generation. We also feel that all times are one time, and that mothers and children are just the same at all times. While all the three generations are uniformly segmented, the last generation (1965-85) alone is given an additional epilogue and the narration is presented as happening in future, in the year 1998. This simultaneity in effect is achieved by the symmetry in grouping characters. In each generation we have a young husband and wife, their parents and their children. The concentration is twofold: to study how at one time there was a strong feeling of organic community supporting through thick and thin a family, sharing its joys and sorrows and how his sense of neighbourhood and togetherness slowly dies owing partly to changes in social structure, partly to change in attitudes, and the family chooses to face its problems by itself. Life is presented at one time keeping itself close to the rhythm of nature and hence there is primordial harmony between individuals, society and nature. But the tempo of life changes with passing years, altering with it the other relations. This is reflected in the novel by its tapering structure, or the structure of an inverted pyramid which is seen in the concept and shape of the family. We begin with a Hindu joint family spontaneously supported by the whole community in the village which itself is only a larger family since marriages would take place among the families in the same village or at the worst with members of a neighbouring village. There is a teeming richness in the village community life. We move on to witness the reduction of the family to a nuclear family, resisting blind orthodoxy, wanting to be flexible, keeping the community at a distance. Then we end up with isolated individuals who have very little social links, few common customs to follow and practically no sacraments to observe in as much as the sacraments have become rituals in the second generation and empty rituals in the third generation, almost meaningless superstitions which had to be broken. The alienated individuals even defy the ethical codes which are already much enfeebled. Thus the structural development of the novel seems to imply an oblique indictment of the younger generation while trying to understand and sympathize with them. However, the ending of the novel which is set in 1998 seems to imply that forms may change but the spirit remains. The daughter who once defied her family and asserted her individuality now feels mellowed and inclined to act as a natural bridge between her ageing lonely mother (who was herself a radical in her time divorcing her brute of a husband) and her supercosmopolitan daughter of the space age, who is not even in her teens but who resents her grandmother's orthodoxy and interference in her affairs.

The surface contrasts are between young girls of each generation : their attitude to the elders and their admonitions to keep discipline and modesty. In the first generation with which the novel opens, the mother trains her seven-year old

daughter in the onerous duties of the household. The daughter meekly accepts the injunctions except for an occasional weak protest. The girl Sivagamu is moulded into a fit instrument to carry out the family responsibilities which are also social. It is the fear of the elders and the implicit acceptance of the wisdom of the elders that stands by her when she passively accepts the barbarous custom of disfiguring a widow. But she does not become embittered. In the second generation, although Mythili is still meek and obedient, she feels weighed down by the puritanical control of her uncompromising grandmother Anandam Patti. The old woman won't let her learn dance, won't let her play with boys, won't let her do anything that would be 'unbecoming' a girl. It is a repression leading to inarticulate frustration. Fortunately for her, her husband turns out to be a very broad-minded man and goes all out to respect and fulfil her wishes and desires. He arranges for their daughter Padmini to learn dancing which gives Mythili vicarious satisfaction. Mythili, we note, does not develop any antipathy towards her grandmother or mother-in-law. On the contrary she acts as a bridge between her daughter who is impatient with her grandmother and her mother-in-law Mangalam. When we turn to Charu's daughter Aparna of the present generation we have twin pictures which provide at once parallelism and contrast. Aparna simply resents Aunt Vimala's reprimands and she does not mince matters in asking the old lady to keep her mouth shut. Her mother Charu helplessly watches this psychological incompatibility between her aunt who has been more than a mother to her and her irate, volatile, teenage daughter. But when Aparna's own daughter Bulbul--originally named Sinduja--grows into a super-modern girl, she calls her grandmother Charu a garrulous old woman and won't remain at home to greet her on arrival from Madras. Here we find Aparna, maturing into a sober woman, striving to bridge the generation gap, which has indeed become a gulf, between her mother and daughter.

How do surface contrasts become deep parallelisms? Let us take a look at the older women in the novel. Sivagamu's mother-in-law Thylambal is harsh on her grand daughters and drives them to impotent rage. This resistance to the elders becomes a recurring motif in all the generations. Mythili's grandmother Anandam is a veritable puritan and disciplinarian. Venkat's mother Mangalam is conservative and old-fashioned and falls foul of her grand children. In her own younger days she has been a kind and understanding woman, as confessed by Venkat himself. But Mythili admits that her insistence on discipline and restraint is after all for the good of the youngsters. She pities her mother-in-law Mangalam for her inability to admit that life changes and acknowledge its inevitability. Aunt Vimala in the third generation, though living in Pune, far away from the constraints of an insular society, is still a believer in the values of the older discipline. Charu has of course no difficulty with her. But her daughter cannot tolerate her presence. For instance Aparna invites Charu and Aunt Vimala to her flat for lunch. Vimala carries fruits, chocolates etc.; there is to begin with a rare amity and amiability between the two. Alas, it lasts but for a short while. For Vimala is

offended by Aparna addressing Siddhart in an unconventional manner without apparently giving him the respect due to a husband. But Aparna insists on her ways and silences her aunt. There is obviously a strained relationship between the elders and the youngsters. This gets worse when Charu herself grows into an ageing woman and her own granddaughter thinks that she is incorrigible. Charu lives in Madras and visits them only occasionally. But surprisingly it is Aparna who strikes a positive note by correcting Bulbul and by mollifying Charu's hurt and disappointed feelings when she learns that her granddaughter has gone on Himalayan trekking and will not stay on to spend a day with her grandmother. We recall Mythili who used to chide Padmini when she protested against her grandmother's criticisms; we recall Charu's own weak chiding of Aparna when she was critical of Aunt Vimala. Now Aparna is in a similar role, a young mother trying to cope with her daughter's waywardness and callousness towards the older generation. This is the same girl who coolly told her mother after terminating her forty days' pregnancy, "Don't make a fuss, mummy." We realize that between the so-called radicals and die-hard conservatives there is perhaps only a thin line and it breaks when the human need to be loved and cherished becomes consuming.

III

We have so far examined the design or structure of the novel. We saw how it is supremely fitted to embody the novelist's vision of a culture crumbling under the weight of modernism. What gives depth and weight to the narrative is the concentration on what happens to the sacraments that govern the Hindu way of life and the episodes describing the rituals connected with them. The subject of the episodes that connects the different parts of the narrative is the *sacraments*—a very unsatisfactory and inadequate way of rendering the Sanskrit term 'samskara'. For a Hindu, life is a process of purification which starts with the very conception of the child and ends with the offering of the body to the fire at the time of cremation. It is the focus on sacraments which enables the novelist to dramatize the tension between the absolute values which the sacraments embody and the relativity which the rituals associated with the sacraments reflect. When a girl attains puberty it is an occasion for purification. Upanayanam is preparing the young boy for the life of a 'dvija', the twice-born. Marriage and consummation are occasions for sublimating human companionship. Death again is an occasion not only for offering the body to the fire but preparing the soul for a rebirth after dissolving the attachments that bind the soul to this earth. In the Hindu system in general and for a Brahmin in particular, each, samskara is an initiation into the meaning and purpose of life at different stages. The question is, how far the rituals are the inevitable and organic symbols of the sacraments.

Among the several sacraments described we may chiefly examine the novelist's treatment of marriage and death and refer to the others in passing.

Marriages take place in three generations but we see how different are the attitudes of the persons involved and the persons arranging them. The marriage ceremony in the first generation (1907-31) brings in practically the whole community into action spearheaded by the patriarchal figure of the grandfather Kulasthi. Sivagamu and Subramanian (nicknamed Suppuni) submit to the custom of 'balya vivaham', the early marriage prevalent in olden days. The novelist captures the very flavour of such a ceremony in all its variety. The men and women bustle around like ants, each contributing his/her mite. The novelist transports us to the times she describes. The rituals are meticulously delineated. The value of the sacrament will not be fully realized unless we go to another chapter wherein the consummation of the marriage is the focus. The profound spiritual implications of this relationship are enjoined on the young couple by their parents who are seasoned elders. Every ritual concerned with the sacrament points to the common 'dharma' for which the man and woman must live. The couple come together at the auspicious hour. We have a profound perception of the meaning of the central human relationship which is a purposive act. There is absolutely nothing risqué or carnal, it is an all inclusive ritual. Since the two people involved are so young and obedient there is an innocence about it. The most important thing to note is the advice the mother gives to the young girl asking her to be flexible, and accommodating, and give her entire self to her husband's family. The advice is in keeping with the ideal of total dedication and utter self-consecration set up for a girl who becomes a wife. The novelist has almost a nostalgic longing for such a harmonious relationship that characterised the young married couple of that generation.

The focus shifts in the two consecutive chapters describing weddings in the 1940-64 and 1965-85 generations. When Mythili and Venkat are united in wedlock, marriage is still a sacrament and so is its consummation. But Venkat is not in favour of needless and perhaps, adventitious rituals which may strike a coarse note now that the couple are not that young and innocent. The celebration of the wedding is itself cut down from five days to a day and a half. Venkat is a young lawyer, who would observe the spirit of orthodoxy and its customs as far as he is convinced of its rationale. He strikes a balance between diehard conservatism represented by his unenlightened mother and the 'deracinated' men and women of the next generation. The most beautiful thing is the way he educates his young wife Mythili in the art of conjugal life. In spite of the irksome attitudes of his mother and the resistance of their children to their grandmother, he and his wife manage to create an atmosphere of harmony, to make marriage an experience of concord, born of thinking and understanding. The author's total identification seems to lie with the second generation. Though Venkat and Mythili for sometime live in a nuclear family they do not hesitate to take in his widowed mother and his younger brother when such a step becomes necessary.

The marriage of Charu to Suresh in the next generation brings in a note of discord and bears witness to the obliteration of the ideal that ought to bind a couple

in conjugal life. Charu's father and his household - set in Poona - are cosmopolitan in spirit; Charu is an educated girl and is employed; their very idiom and outlook are modern. The marriage of Charu is performed in the traditional way, of course, though stripped of all elaborate rituals and customs. But her married life is bereft of all sacramental significance. Charu is no Sivagamu or Mythili and the saddest part is her realization that her husband Suresh, for all his perfect etiquette and sleek appearance, is a brute and libertine to the core. Charu decides to break off the marriage bond and apply for divorce, a measure which in earlier generations women would not have thought of. We do not condemn Charu in as much as Suresh has only indulged his lust instead of sublimating his impulses. He has grievously violated the sacrament of marriage. The novelist captures the changed society in describing the paraphernalia of Charu's wedding. It takes place in a hotel in Madras. There is no crowding of relations. After the birth of a daughter to Charu in this unfortunate wedlock, the parents-in-law visit her. She has already sued Suresh for divorce. The mother-in-law is torn between her passion and yearning for harmony and admitting her son's guilt. The father-in-law is such a cosmopolitan courteous gentleman that he will not ask Charu to reconsider her resolution. Charu goes to Bombay with her child and sets up a lonely household. She is a symbol of the changes that have come in the status of women in contemporary society, its strength as well as its vulnerability.

There is one more type of marriage taking place within the last generation which shows how far removed are people from the ethical spirit and the ideals that inspired their ancestors. Charu's daughter grows into a thoroughly independent and resolute girl, she fixes her own marriage at the age of nineteen - too early for a modern girl to marry. Here is a simple registered marriage and no religious sacrament. She terminates her pregnancy five months after her wedding, Siddhart dies in a plane accident and she marries Vimal without any ado after eight months.

That brings us to the treatment of the sacrament of death and widowhood. In the first generation Suppuni dies of heart attack leaving Sivagamu to the will of a conservative society which consigns her to the life of a young widow with a tonsured head and widow's weeds. The conservative community has rigid codes of conduct and rituals. Given the native sense of dedication of everything human to the Divine, death is as much a sacrament as marriage. The community is still cohesive and gives a helping hand to the family. The parallelism is striking when the same patriarchal figure of grandfather Kalasthi who efficiently organized Sivagamu's wedding, now in a spirit of resignation and simple faith, as efficiently organizes the funeral arrangements of her husband. The chapter is not only an authentic record of the beliefs and rituals concerning death in such a family, it is a profoundly meaningful rendition. At the end of the obsequies Sivagamu the individual and her agony are subsumed in the overall spirit of acceptance and renewal which marked the old way of life. The reader cannot help noticing the juxtaposition of Sivagamu's condition with Aparna's. Aparna too loses her

husband at the age of nineteen. But what a contrast ! She is calm, self-assured, self assertive and totally self-reliant. She detests anyone intruding on her privacy. She will face the reality by herself, unpropped by the sentimental affliction of her mother or grandmother. Unlike Sivagamu who could not even see her husband taken to the cremation ghat, Aparna goes to the place of the plane crash, identifies her husband's body, brings it back in a coffin, takes it to the crematorium. She nonchalantly declines to take the ashes, saying that she does not believe in such things. The reader is somewhat disturbed by her total secular attitude, but at the same time cannot help admiring her poise and self-restraint. She prefers to be an isolated individual rather than a non-entity conforming to tradition. She is an enigma even to her mother, leave alone her grandmother.

IV

The novel *Bridges* has thus two dimensions : one is sociological, even anthropological i.e. an attempt to study the customs, habits and rituals of a highly organized community, to capture the very flavour of its life and speech; the other is spiritual i.e. to scrutinize the deep structure of the society constituted by its eternal values inhering in its sacraments and pieties. One is therefore temporal; and the other spiritual. The overall pattern seems to be a study within a homogenous culture, of the state of *harmony* giving way to *conflict* and *conflict* leading through disintegration to *near alienation*. The treatment is authentically Indian in as much as the novel strikes a positive note in affirming faith in the efficacy of self-giving and self-effacement rather than possessiveness and gratification. The absolute Indian ideal would, of course, be living for the Divine rather than one's own self. In the novel there is an implied admiration for the ancient Indian social system based on such a value. One may recall in this context the end of Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* where the materialistic values of a burgher family and its failure to nurse the heart and the spirit, finally lead to disintegration and self-annihilation. Sivasankari's novel *Bridges* seems to imply that we may not have to face such a predicament, belonging as we do to a culture which with its anchorage in the spirit, has all its changing patterns ultimately rooted in one Dharma. The title suggests a perpetual renewal of 'natural piety that binds each to each'. There is of course, no denying the fact that there is in the novel a tension between relativism and absolutism on the one hand and different kinds of relativism on the other. The novelist's sympathies seem to lie with the conservative past with its organic community life, its faith in discipline, its cohesion (for all its being hide-bound), a characteristic which she shares with all prophets of culture. But she has not spared its puritanical repressive spirit, its doggedness, its want of flexibility, its spirit hardening into empty rituals which deserve to be broken. In delineating the two later generations she has underscored the need for flexibility, tempering discipline with spontaneity and she has accepted with an admirable practical

sense the inevitability of change. However the novel is not without a clue to break the impasse arising from the deadlock between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. The novel is firmly set in the large Indian cultural context which has believed that absolutism and relativism are not antithetical and 'sanatanadharma' includes 'adhikaratatva'. Hence the note of optimism struck at the end.

Bridges is technically and thematically an ambitious, but authentic commentary on a culture and a significant contribution to the diagnosis of a centrifugal situation within that culture.

One last word about its stylistic devices, especially the way the novelist exploits the dialect and idiolect of the places and the people. It is the contemporary English poet Kathleen Raine who made the observation that "words cannot be separated from the particular group soul grown on certain kind of earth under certain skies and conversing for centuries upon certain themes". She put it much more forcefully when she observed, "The words of the ancestors come to us loaded with their experience of the earth as they have known it". The novelist is most effective and most concrete in those passages where the idioms and the metaphors are rooted in the soil. Take, for example, the grandfather sitting in front of the house and ordering about his sons, relations and servants while arranging for the consummation ceremony of his granddaughter Sivagamu. In paraphrasing his speech we may say that the grandfather is doubtful whether the man to whom a job is entrusted is likely to carry it out since he is the sort of fellow wasting his time in idle talk and gallivanting. But it is only a Tanjorian Smarta Brahmin who knows how much of the flavour is lost in English translation. The novel resounds with such authentic tones and turns of speech. It is a feat in documentation in Tamil fiction of a whole way of life.

Truth, History and Fiction: A Comparative Study of Bankim Chandra Chatterji and C.V. Raman Pillai

K. Ayyappa Paniker

Historical fiction is a cross between history and fiction. History is supposed to be an account of Reality. Reality consists of facts. The truth that is lost amid the welter of facts is the concern of historical fiction. The assumption here seems to be that facts are not the best custodian of truth. Truth is a value; it is created or invented by the investigator. Reality may not always enshrine this value. Facts may misrepresent truth. Facts can be distorted, can be manipulated. But fiction, as opposed to fact, can discover, recover or retrieve the truth that is hidden by fact. Thus the writer of historical fiction, like his potential reader, recreates history using the fictive mode. Fiction alone can help him to complete the incompleteness of history apprehended through fact. All values are human creations. Truth is such a value, and it has to be created by the human narrator or raconteur. In the telling of the story as visualized by him, he discovers the truth. Fiction thus becomes a means of creating what is lost through the 'factual' approach of history. But history can be interpreted by means of fictive creations which can fill the gaps left by the known facts. Fiction is thus complementary and corrective to the facts of history. Fiction makes the events of the past contemporary with us. The past is seen as making reality relevant to the present and the future. While history may emphasize the pastness of the past, fiction based on history may emphasize the continuing relevance of the past, the presentness of the past. This was what myth used to do in ancient literatures. It preserves the essential truth of the world around in the form of little fictions. The folktale and the fairy tale performed the same function. The mythological plays of ancient Greece can thus be compared to the historical plays of Elizabethan England. Shakespeare, like his contemporaries, fictionalized history. The chronicle narratives of Holinshed, Hall and

Fabyan are transcended by the history plays. The fictionalization is a means of this transcendence. Historical fiction thus transcends pure history. It is one way of highlighting the interrelationships among the characters of history.

While this approach to historical fiction may be true of all the major works of fictionalized history, there is a special relevance for this approach in the case of two major Indian novelists of the 19th century. Bankim Chandra Chatterji (1838-1894), often called the father of the Bengali novel, wrote his first Bengali work of fiction *Durgesanandini* in 1865. C.V. Raman Pillai (1856-1922), one of the greatest of Malayalam novelists, wrote his first work of fiction *Martanda Varma* in 1891. These two works show remarkable similarities in many important aspects. I have not come across any detailed study of these two works in comparison. Both are inspired by the historical novels of Walter Scott, especially *Ivanhoe*. Both are attempts to give flesh and blood to the dry details of the history of a bygone age. Both try to bring together the two major communities of India, before the struggle for independence from Britain becomes a major issue for the masses of India. Both try to see excellent specimens of virtue and heroism among both Hindus and Muslims. Both project men and women larger than life size. Both portray the sense of wonder - *Adbhuta rasa* - in the historical context with matchless skill. Critics have chosen to describe both these works as historical romances because of the strange coincidences and improbabilities in the construction of the plot. Jagat Singh and Ananta Padmanabhan are both wounded and looked after by Muslim girls - Ayesha and Suleikha - who later give up their claims on the objects of their affection with superhuman selflessness in favour of the Hindu girls in love with them. Vimala in *Durgesanandini* is an archetypal image of the heroic woman in whose mould is cast Subhadra of *Martanda Varma*. In both novels the forest scenes are particularly important : this shows that their respective authors belong to the mullai tinai of Akam poetry and Vanchi tinai of Puram poetry as seen in the landscape classification made by the classic of Dravidian poetics Tolhappiam. Both *Durgesanandini* and *Martanda Varma* abound in battle scenes, rarely described with better skill in later Indian fiction. Nearly 25 years separate the publication of *Durgesanandini* with *Martanda Varma*, but there is no clear evidence to C.V. Raman Pillai ever having read the Bengali work in English translation at least. The similarities between the two works seem to suggest that C.V. Raman Pillai might have read the novel by Bankim Chandra during his sojourn in Madras. The Malayalam translation of *Durgesanandini* was published in 1911, 20 years after the publication of *Martanda Varma*. In the Foreword to the 1911 translation of *Durgesanandini* in Malayalam, Ulloor Parameswara Iyer gave very high praise to Bankim Chandra and his novel :

It was the study of English literature that implanted in us a taste for novel reading. European tales, however, with all their merits, could not appeal to us in the same manner as stories dealing with our own society. Hence the effort of authors like Mrs. Steele,

Redmond Mitchell, and the late Meadows Taylor to produce Anglo-Indian novels in the wake of Scott's "Surgeon's Daughter". But the Hindu society which those gifted writers attempted to portray is one whose veil is not easily lifted from without. It may, therefore, not be their fault, if they could not do full justice to the task they took in hand. The fact was that it required Indian novelists to depict Indian life. The field was certainly fertile, but had to be rendered fruitful, and it was reserved for the genius of Bankim Chandra to prove to an astonishing [sic] world what splendid achievements, given the opportunity, a Hindu could make, even in the rarefied atmosphere of creative imagination.

The world of C.V.Raman Pillai's fiction is as deeply imbued with the subtle influence of nature as that of Bankim Chandra. Wild forests, hills and rivers are integral parts of their landscape and human characters reveal their innermost secrets and passions against such unusual settings especially when enveloped by the darkness of night. Deserted temples, huge fortifications, hidden caves, strange and eerie noises in darkness, disguises of all kinds, surprise attacks, mysterious revelations: these are common to their novels. A pervasive sense of patriotism adds to their inexplicable appeal. Courage and selflessness characterise their heroes and heroines; duplicity and cowardice mark their villains. The good are absolutely good, and the evil are pronouncedly so. Their women characters are either idealized types, though not always angels: they remind us of some of the bold heroic types of the Puranas. Tilottama of *Durgesanandini* is an elder sister of Parukutty of *Martanda Varma*. The Vimala-Subhadra type and the Ayesha-Suleikha type are poignantly impressive. Sixteenth century Bengal and eighteenth century Travancore (Southern Kerala) are marked by dissensions and petty squabbles of all kinds. Both the historical characters and the unhistorical ones are drawn in sharp colours and bold outlines. The historical merges with the fictions and thereby reinforce each other. Both are deeply influenced by Indian epics and Puranas. The resemblance between European historical novels and these historical romances is not to be ignored. But the Indian novelists did not have dependable official records of the events of the time. Popular beliefs and ballads and folk-tales must have fired their imagination and helped it to body forth these characters partly because of their being non-historical have come to have an ahistorical significance. Their universality is accounted for by their ability to stand head and shoulders above ordinary humanity. Like the gigantic characters of Wagner's operas, they inspire awe and admiration. But it should not be forgotten that there are also plenty of life-size portrayals and a few less than life-size. The dialogue can become colloquial at times without any high falutin.

The greatest similarity is perhaps in their narrative style. The gaps in the narrative structure are functional and quite in character with the nature of the plot.

The supernatural that modulates the course of the narrative is made convincing by the power of description. The effort to keep the readers in suspense till the end is to be found in both the novels : it is part of the narrative strategy of their authors. In this respect they are closer to the epics and the Puranas than to contemporary western novels.

A word about the differences also must be added here. The social milieu of eighteenth century Venad or even Travancore is very different from that of sixteenth century Bengal. The Hindu-Muslim opposition is more vital in Bengal whereas in the Venad of that time the factions were among the Hindus themselves. The Muslims have only a very marginal role. Yet the fact that C.V.Raman Pillai recognised the Muslim presence in *Martanda Varma* is significant : some of the later Malayalam classics like Thakazhi's *Chemmeen* and Uroob's *Ummachu* (translated into English as *Beloved*) have developed this theme - especially infructuous love between Hindu and Muslim characters.

In his introduction (written in English again) to the Malayalam translation of *Visha Vriksha* published in 1912, Kerala Varma, a dominant literary figure of those days who had twenty years earlier translated the novel *Akbar* into Malayalam, expressed his appreciation for the author of *Durgesanandini*. Comparing the mushroom growth of novel in England and in India he says :

What it is in English, so it is also in India. Since Bankim Chandra Chatterji published his *Durgesanandini* our country too in a small degree has had her own quota of story-writing. Both Anglo-Indians and Indians have freely put their hands to the plough, and novels have been forthcoming here, if not in the thousands as in the West, at least in scores -- English, Bengalee, Tamil, Telegu and other languages. But the master novelist of Bengal still stands where he was on an eminence evidently enviable, unapproached and unapproachable. Whoever dreamt in the wildest of his dreams that India so bleak and barren in the growth of history and tale, would produce a creative genius of his type ? But so it has been in all ages and countries. To put it in the beautiful words of Carlyle, "Is not every genius an impossibility till he appears? Why do we call him new and original if we saw where his marble was lying and what fabric he could rear from it ?"

What is more interesting than this spontaneous recognition of Bankim Chandra's significance is his perception of Bankim's closeness to the Indian tradition. He adds :

There are some critics who hold that the modern Indian story is a fascimile of the European novel. To say so is a travesty of truth.... All that Europe supplied India was but a new treatment, a new technique. Bankim Chandra put the fresh methods to

indigenous uses and the resulting work of art was as purely Indian as anything in Sanskrit literature.

Coming as it does from a great Sanskrit savant, this is no mean tribute. This shows that the charge against the indebtedness of our modern literature to European sources is not a recent one. But now when we closely examine the structure and thematic preoccupations of the novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterji and C.V. Raman Pillai we see that their debt to the West is not greater than their debt to an Indian heritage. *Durgesanandini* and *Martanda Varma* are closer in spirit and structure to the ancient Indian epics, puranas, and tales like *Kadambari* than to any nineteenth century English or European novel. And this is a matter of gratification.

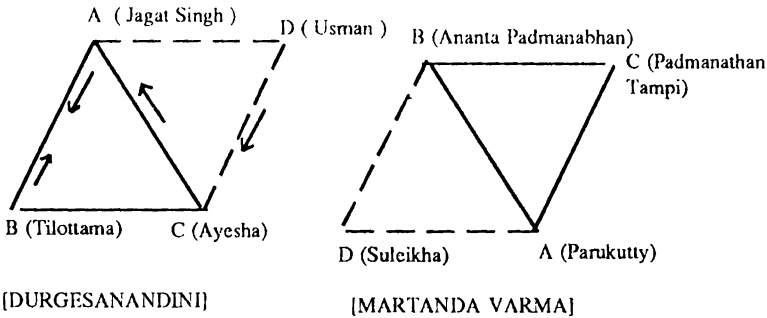
Addenda

1. It should be pointed out that *Durgesanandini* and *Martanda Varma* are not fictionalized history, but only historical fiction. They do not claim to be history; they claim to be fiction. While both history and fiction are narratives, one does not pretend to take the place of the other. In fiction inventiveness dominates; in history it is objectivity that sustains credibility. History has to be logical and chronological, while fiction tolerates the free play of imagination. In their preoccupation with a bygone age, both Bankim Chandra and C.V. Raman Pillai are alike: the unhistorical characters they invented became more interesting than the purely historical characters. They filled the abstractions of history with flesh and blood. This has made it possible for us to observe the psychological realities of the periods their works were concerned with.

2. The underlying theme of *Martanda Varma* is not the love between Parukutty and Ananta Padmanabhan, nor even the infatuation of Padmanabhan Tampi with Parukutty. Behind the struggle for power between Martanda Varma, the nephew of the dying Maharaja, and Padmanabhan Tampi, the latter's son is the mundane conflict between two types of inheritance: one, the traditional and customary matrilinealism and the other the alien patriarchal system. Tampi represented the system that was imported from Ayodhya through his mother. The chieftains of the Eight Houses supported Tampi because they could not tolerate the rise of a strong-willed prince like Martanda Varma, whom they could not have in their control. But they themselves followed the matrilineal system in their families. However, in spite of the medieval or semi-medieval historical background of the two novels, the two authors clearly demonstrate their contemporary concerns. Bankim Chandra wanted freedom from the control of aliens, Muslims as well as the British. C.V. Raman Pillai seems to champion matrilineal inheritance in preference to the patrilineal one. Chandu Menon too was of the same view.

3. A curious kind of difference may be found between the plots of the two

works. In Bankim Chandra's *Durgesanandini* (as well as in *Kapalakundala*), the hero of the main plot is loved by two women, only one of whom can aspire to succeed. Jagat Singh is loved by Tilottama and Ayesha. But in *Martanda Varma* (as well as in the author's later works) the heroine of the main plot is loved by two men: Parukutty's hand is coveted by Padmanabhan Tampi and Ananta Padmanabhan. [It is interesting to note that in Chandu Menon's *Indulekha* (1889) too, one woman is pitted against two men.] This may be represented by two triangles, as follows:



The primary triangles are reversed : this may indicate the individual predilections of the respective authors rather than those of the people of the two areas, Bengal and Kerala. The secondary triangles seem to share the quality of a subplot: ACD and ABD. It is interesting to ask why the Hindu-Muslim marriage is not shown as a possibility even in fiction.

4. The first two great novels (as well as novelists) in Malayalam continue to be the greatest till date. They seem to complement each other in a remarkable way.

C.V.Ramana Pillai

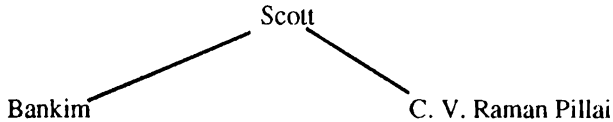
1. Historical Fiction
2. Tragic Vision
3. Men and Women characters equally strong and important
4. Travancore area central
5. High, rare rhetoric
6. Multi-faceted

Chāndu Menon

1. Social Fiction
2. Comedic and Satiric Vision
3. Women dominate, as titles indicate
4. Malabar area central
5. Low, common rhetoric
6. More concentrated

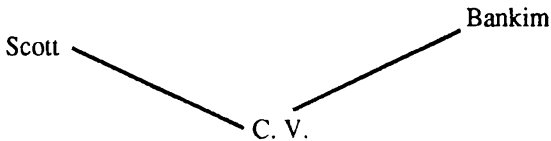
5. There can be two models to relate Bankim Chandra to C.V.Raman Pillai: Both of them had read Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* and the historical plays of

Shakespeare. There is evidence for that. The model then would be



In the definitive biography of C.V.Raman Pillai, there is no mention of Bankim Chandra or *Durgesanandini* as a model for C.V.'s *Martanda Varma*. But if C.V. had read then the *Captain's Daughter* before writing *Martanda Varma* then following model would explain the direction of the influence:

EITHER



OR

Walter Scott → Bankim Chandra → C.V.Raman Pillai

This may be purely speculative. Until fresh evidence proves that C.V. had read *Durgesanandini*, the first model will prevail. What is more interesting here is to find out (a) what they both learned from Scott, (b) what they adopted or adapted from him, (c) what they did not take from him, (d) what they added to it and (e) how they modified it.

Towards the Evolution of an African Language for African Literature

Gabriel Okara

Language as a problem in African literature has existed (recognized as such or not) from the very beginnings when Africans started to write in the languages of their colonial rulers. The problem surfaced through self-discovery and has come under various degrees of perception and awareness - from the indifferent casual scrutiny to the realization of it as a problem which every African writer must face and must resolve to overcome.

The Nobel Prize has not changed the felt need for an African language for our literature. Though it has not changed things but as the symbol of European literary excellence and of world acclaim, it may create in some African writers the tendency to regard the self-evident language problem as non-existent, or at least, as one drummed up by those who want it as cover for their deficiency in the use of the English language. Or the uninhibited may come out to say that the problem is a hindrance to the hopes of ever winning the Nobel Prize for literature and ignore it. Indeed, there is no glimmer of the Nobel Prize at the end of the tunnel for those of us who have dedicated our pens and minds to overcome the problem. But the search for a solution is a worthy task on which to engage one's mind.

The foregoing is just by way of a very brief introduction to the subject of this paper titled "Towards the Evolution of an African Language for African Literature". We will be discussing very briefly the developments and trends and the future in the use of the English language as the medium of expression in Anglophone Africa. No attempt is going to be made to cover the other literatures of Africa, such as that of Francophone Africa and those of the former Portuguese and Spanish colonies. I believe, something is also pushing in these areas demanding a change in the use of their metropolitan languages in their literatures.

This paper is going to express strictly the point of view of a writer whose work

The Voice has been in the thick of debate and criticism about the way the English language should or should not be used to express the African ethos - ethics, aesthetics, the writer's milieu, our African culture in our literature in English.

The debate I think, actually began at the Makerere conference on African writers in Kampala Uganda in 1962. It has continued ever since, and two schools of thought emerged at the beginning: one held the view that there was no problem at all in the use of the English language as our medium of expression. Our Africanness would show anyhow, since a leopard never changed its spots. Those who belong to this school of thought I call the 'neo-metropolitans'. The second school of thought to which I belong, feels there is the need for something to be done to the English language in order to make it an adequate transmitter of the African message. This group of writers I call the 'evolutionists/experimenters'. Quite recently, another school of thought has raised its strident voice to announce its bold stand against the other two. It advocates a total rejection of the English language as the medium of expression of anglophone writers. This school of thought feels that authenticity and the artistic integrity of African creative writers can only be attained by the use of an African language native to the writer as his medium of creative expression. However, let us leave these schools of thought for the moment. We shall return to them presently.

Let us instead go back a little in time, to examine how the English language has insinuated itself into the very fibre and core of the life of a very important and articulate segment of our Nigerian society. To this segment of our society, the middle class, English is no longer an alien language. To them and many more, English has become a *de facto* African language. It seems to me that when speaking your native language becomes a conscious activity, it has lost its premier position to another which comes more easily and naturally to your lips. The urban middle class dwellers and others less affluent but who are also urban dwellers have thus become speakers of one form or the other of English in preference to their native languages. They only speak their native languages, some only haltingly when it is absolutely necessary.

Such an outcome predictably, is inevitable when many of the children of the middle class urban dwellers attend special expatriate schools. In these schools the girls are taught to curtsy and the boys to bow, from the waist up, with a flourish of the right hand holding a top hat, in the elegance of Elizabethan ladies and gentlemen! This has led to a most telling phenomenon in some middle class families of mixed marriages in urban centres. The offsprings of these families are now monolingual, not in their mother tongues but in English. This may not be true of all such families but the mustard seed of monolingualism of families has been sown in our society. And the number of such families will certainly grow by the simple but natural law of seed multiplication and dispersal or like the leaven, it may over the years change the very complexion and tone of our society. I am not given to hyperbolic statements but the situation as I see it is so ridiculous but menacing that I am driven to a state of mind which could only be appeased by such

would therefore brusquely consign it to the realm of dreams and confine it there as long as the balance of literacy remains weighted heavily in favour of the metropolitan languages. This will remain so for some time yet to come.

Pre-dating Ngugi's move, there have been writers who have been writing in their languages and dialects. Some contemporary writers are bilingual; Kunene, Okot P'Bitek and Ngugi himself are bilingual; while in Nigeria the famous Fagunwa, the Yoruba storyteller wrote in Yoruba, and Ogunda, the veteran playwright, continues to write his plays in Yoruba. I am sure there are also similar writers practising their craft without fanfare in the Francophone countries. But the problem with writing in African languages is that such works would only be known and appreciated in the localities where the languages are spoken. They become localized in a few pockets of the continent. This obviously falls far short of the Pan-Africanist vision of a continental literature written in a continental language.

Ngugi has declared that from now on he will write only in his native Gikuyu or Swahili. His works will now appear in English as translations only. But let him hear Ken Goodwin on Mazisi Kunene's English translations of his own Zulu poems:

Kunene's English versions often representing a rather truncated version of the original. Nevertheless important poems in their own right.

I have a feeling that Ngugi would not like his works to appear in English as a 'truncated' version of his excellent Gikuyu originals.

Suggestions have been made over and over again for a language for Africa and its literature. At a conference in Tanzania, Swahili was suggested as such a language. I do not think this suggestion went beyond the thundering shouts of applause, the hand clappings and foot stampings with which it was all acclaimed. It died with the last sound of the applause. The sudden realization of the immensity and complexity of the problems which would have to be overcome before its implementation killed it. But like an ogbanje, the idea is born again and again tauntingly at conferences, but only to die again and again with a mocking smile playing on its lips.

THE EVOLUTIONISTS/EXPERIMENTERS: The Kampala conference of anglophone writers in 1962 marked the beginning of the articulation of the search for an authentic African literature, and the suggestions of how this could be achieved. For, it is now an established fact that our African ideas, philosophy, culture, as experienced and expressed in our African languages cannot be expressed effectively in English. The corollary to this of course, has been the continuing quest through experimentation, a mode of employing the English language, which we have appropriated, to give full expression to our culture and our point of view, our message, without seeing ourselves, or others seeing us, as through a distorting mirror. This is the stand of the Evolutionists/Experimenters.

Writers of this third group, therefore, take a position between the two extremist ones we have already discussed briefly. They are of the opinion that while English remains, at least for the time being, their medium of expression, it must be used in such a way as to make their creative writing indisputably African in concept and execution. Members of this group may differ in their individual approaches, which is healthy, but they have one burning purpose : to evolve a way in the use of the English language to express the totality of the message of African culture in their works. In the televised discussion already quoted Professor Achebe who belongs to this group spoke more on what the group is doing :

What we are trying to do in a way is an experiment. But if we keep the metropolitan, the English language, then it certainly has to be able to cope with our experience. In other words, we ought to be able to do something to it that it can carry our particular message. That is exactly what we are doing, though our approaches may be a little different. Some writers of this group have however, critical acclaim while others have received both acclaim and critical uncertainty and even despair. Among such critics have been those that the triumvirate of the book *Towards the Decolonisation of African Literature* call the Eurocentric critics and writers.

Professor Kalu Uka sees these experimentations as a subtle kind of bilingualism in the literary language of our educated writers and mentioning Achebe as one example he says :

In Achebe's usage, we find a basic groundwork of Igbo syntax and ideas in words which are extremely English. We also find tonal modulations, proverbial nuances. These so blend, so synthesize into the formal framework which was English as to show new seams and new embroidery.

And on Gabriel Okara as another example, he says :

In Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* we also confront confrontations--claw syntax in English forms, verbal units that seem to stumble but toddle refreshingly in new meanings, moulds of image that may excite more than one level of comprehension. All this in the process of the author searching authenticity.

In Professor Kalu Uka's finely tuned critical perception this new trend is even discernible in some of the works of Wole Soyinka. He says :

In Wole Soyinka, also, specially in the plays which use so much Yoruba religious and mythical idiom, such plays as *A Dance of the Forest* and *The Road*, we find several new patterns of expression and levels of class language in song, in S mine (sic) and in imagery. We feel something new is emerging even if we cannot always find a name for it, much as puzzling new but certain discovery.

Many more critical voices have been raised for or against this "puzzling new but certain discovery".

Only a few discerning critics were aware of what was happening or what we of this group were trying to achieve by the way we used the English language in our individual approaches to the problem of authenticity and identity. When asked during an interview in 1972, on how I arrived at the style of *The Voice*, I said :

the literature of any country must reflect the culture, the thinking, the philosophy, the customs, the ideas of the people of that country.... And to reflect this in our novels, our poetry or drama, we had (sic) two barriers to break through. First, to bring out your ideas in writing as near as possible to your original conception. What I mean is that you cannot express the totality of your ideas in writing just as you cannot do so in drawing or the other arts.... And (then) the second one, which is peculiar to us writing in foreign languages, is how to bring our own thinking, our own imagery, our own ideas, philosophy and so on to be reflected in what we write. So I arrived at the conclusion that probably, if one wrote as closely as possible, not in the way as Tutuola has done in his books, but in some conscious way, one might be able to bring our ideas, our thinking, in fact our whole mode of speech, into whatever we write.

This was the genesis of the style of *The Voice*. It is only one of several by other African writers in our joint effort to solve the problem of language in our literature. Something is bound to emerge. A form of language evolved from English. A literary language common to all anglophone countries in Africa.

It will not be African English like American English, Canadian English or Australian English. These are possible only because the nationals of these countries have metropolitan culture as their reference. An African cannot claim such a reference. His culture is different. His culture is rooted nowhere else but in Africa. If, therefore, an African wishes to use English as an effective medium of literary expression, he has to emulsify it with the patterns, modes and idioms of African speech until it becomes so attenuated as to bear little resemblance to the original.

There is a parallel to this would-be phenomenon in music. Our brothers and sisters introduced a form of African music to America which later came to be known as Jazz after it had been assimilated into the idiom of mainstream American music. Jazz has now assumed classical dimensions the world over. We the Africans, the originators, now have to learn not only how to play it but also how to enjoy it. Only historians of Jazz music would trace it back to Africa. There is another example and this time in the plastic arts. When Picasso could no longer get inspiration from Europe he turned to Africa. His eyes fell on the so-called 'Primitive' art as it was then called. He liked it and it fired his imagination. He incorporated some of the African art forms into his own works. This gave him

instant fame! Again only historians of Picasso's art would note that his later works were informed by African so-called primitive art. In the same way, we should indeed be able to evolve a language which could only be traced back as a derivative of the English language.

The triumvirate of scholars, Chnweizu, Jemie and Madubuike, imbued with exuberant radicalism, in their book *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature*, Vol.1, give full endorsement to the experiments we are making with the English language with these words :

Africans have no business speaking the King's (Queen's) English indistinguishably from an English don; and they have no business trying to prove to Europeans that Africans can speak or write European. Therefore no sense of embarrassment is warranted when an African deviates from standard English by speaking or writing an African variant of it.

Here's an example which I believe will throw some light on my approach to the use of English. I pou iyeringe. The word for word translation is this, I waterside down going. Now let us change the word order a bit and add some words and it comes out as, I am going down to the waterside: and when I add a cushioning phrase it becomes. I am going down to the waterside to ease myself. This reveals the purpose of going to the waterside. The ready equivalent in English is: I am going to the toilet. Now this so-called English equivalent does not, either by allusion or inference, say anything about the life style of the Izon people who inhabit the delta areas of Nigeria. To me, therefore, 'I am going to the toilet' is not an equivalent of the Izon 'I pou iyeringe'. Izon towns and villages are built sometimes on high, steep river banks. And since everything from washing, bathing, laundry and so on, is done in the river, one has to climb up and down the river banks to carry out these daily activities. So the expression 'I am going down to the waterside to ease myself' says something about the way of life, the culture of the people which 'I am going to the toilet, completely obliterates and imposes a system alien to the Izon people, at least in the context of the historical past. The purpose of literature is not to destroy or ignore but to faithfully reflect the culture of the people. Even in the middle of a desert an Izon man would say 'I am going down to the waterside to ease myself'. 'I am going to the toilet' is grossly inadequate as the English idiomatic equivalent. And none can be invented because the use of the waterside as toilet, I believe, has never been the cultural experience of an Englishman in his towns and cities in the remote past.

The triumvirate of the admirable book *Towards the Decolonization of the African Mind*, however goes on to assert the necessity and the reasons for what the Evolutionists/Experimenters have been doing for decades :

A necessity for linguistic experimentation lies in the fact that Africans do not use English the way the English do, and in the fact that the rhetorical devices of each African language and community are peculiar to it and a legacy of its cultural inheritance. If a flavour

of African life is therefore to be captured in novels written in English, the English language has to be fixed and bent to allow these idiomatic and rhetorical usages to be presented. Several African writers have experimented to this end. Some have been more successful than others.

We who have dedicated our minds and pens on it, will continue undaunted to do the flexing and bending, and even brow-beating, of the English language until some common language emerges. We cannot now retreat into our countless languages as languages of African Literatures. That would be building a Chinese wall in the twentieth century to exclude what is already so much within. It would be a futile effort. We let in the Trojan horse hundreds of years ago. We have appropriated the English language. Let us assimilate it into our African systems and evolve the new language we need for the effective expression of our African message without flinching or distortion from one part of Africa to the other and to the whole world.

It was your great Mahatma Gandhi, philosopher, sage, nationalist and father of non-violence, who speaking of the almost irresistible colonialists' cultural onslaught said, I quote: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the land to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people's houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave".

The unrelenting cultural onslaught was through their languages. Therefore an African writer, including myself, who writes in any of the metropolitan languages is "living in other people's houses as an interloper...."

Cross-Cultural Translation and Transmission: Examining the "Orientalist" Gaze

Mahashweta Sengupta

THE CONTEXT

The first European nation to reach the subcontinent of India was Portugal on May 27, 1493, having sailed all around the continent of Africa, they crossed the Arabian Sea with the help of an Indian sailor, and reached Calicut on the southwest coast of India. Their motive for expansion was not just the very human craving for knowledge and adventure, but the desire to curb the spread of Islam and the Arab trade monopoly of spices, and also to extend the bounds of holy Christendom. With the protection of the Papal Bull of Alexander III, the Portugese carried on their trade without any rival for almost a century, until other European powers extended their inter-religious hostility to other regions of the world; the struggle between the Catholic and Protestant powers in Europe became a battle to gain commercial and religious supremacy in Asia. The Protestant nations defied the Papal Bull in dividing the world between Spain and Portugal, and as noted by a historian, "their struggle for commercial supremacy in the East was one aspect of their religious defiance".(1)

The East India Company was established in 1600, and with England's newly found confidence, the Portugese monopoly over the Asian trade was soon undermined. Religious rivalry soon became a minor issue, and the desire for profit and economic power gradually assumed the nature of a political struggle over the domination of India. The early Europeans to the dazzling court of the Mughal Emperors were only traders. but with the dissolution of the empire and the consequent vacuum of power, the Europeans stepped into the role of masters over the natives. In 1701, after the death of the great Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, throughout the eighteenth century, the European powers were, in some way or the other, stepping into the shoes of the former rulers. The process reached its climax

in the Battle of Plassey in 1757, when the English defeated the then King of Bengal and assumed political power in the region. Percival Spear, the noted historian, summarizes the situation well:

After 1757 there thus grew up a state of Bengal administered by the Nawab but where the military power was in the hands of the Company who used it to help themselves to the revenue and give their merchants a free run of the country's internal trade. The sponsored state became a plundered state. In a few years Bengal was ruined and the Company brought to the verge of bankruptcy. The situation could develop without outside interference because of the distracted state of the more vigorous parts of the country. It was from this uncompromising start that the first Company's dominion grew to become the basis for the later hegemony.(2)

Clive was responsible for opening the "floodgates", but he had somehow managed to keep the merchants in check. After his return to England in 1760, however, matters worsened, and there was no limit to the intrigues and power-play not only within the Englishmen trading there, but also with the other Europeans, especially the French settled around the British colonies. Robert Clive was brought back to India in 1765. He sought to consolidate British power, and, very cleverly, he introduced the system of "double Government", where the so called Nawab retained the judicial and administrative functions, and the Company exercised the revenue power.(3) The mechanism remained indigenous, the paraphernalia too was local, but the remote control switch was in the hands of the Britishers.

With a certain amount of successful reform, Clive returned to England in 1767 only to become seriously involved in Company politics and intrigues, and finally committed suicide in 1774. The next person to be sent as Governor was Warren Hastings, a remarkable personality with contradictions that created staunch enemies and good friends like Edmund Burke and Thomas Babbington Macaulay, and who inspired some of the most brilliant parliamentary speeches in Britain. Hastings' life has been the source of numerous psychological and sociological studies, and one is struck by the diverse nature of his interests and occupations. He came to Bengal just two years after the devastating famine that had ruined the country in 1770, and faced the tremendous task of consolidating the Company's power and dominion over the natives with intriguing factions both within and outside the Company to resist his efforts at organising. Hastings realized soon that what was needed was a disciplining of the Company servants who were creating havoc in the country, and Gauri Visvanathan's analysis of the situation seems to be the most accurate account of the state of affairs at the time when Hastings introduced his policy of disseminating the knowledge of India among the East India Company's servants.(4) Hastings' administration created and nurtured the phase designated as the "Orientalist" era in the history of British India, and it is at this time that literary Orientalism became a vogue for the first

time in the history of East-West relations. As Viswanathan aptly summarizes:

Orientalism was adapted as an official policy partly out of expediency and caution and partly out of an emergent political sense that an efficient Indian administration rested on an understanding of Indian culture. It grew out of the concern of Warren Hastings, governor-general from 1774 to 1785, that British administrators and merchants in India were not sufficiently responsive to Indian languages and Indian traditions. The distance between ruler and ruled was perceived to be so vast as to evoke the sentiment that 'we rule over them and traffic with them, but they do not understand our character, and we do not penetrate theirs. The consequence is that we have no hold on their sympathies, no seat in their affections.' Hastings' own administration was distinguished by a tolerance for the native customs and by a cultural empathy unusual for its time. Underlying Orientalism was a tacit policy of what one may call reverse acculturation, whose goal was to train British administrators and civil servants to fit into the culture of the ruled and to assimilate them thoroughly into the native way of life.(5)

In fact, this policy did produce scholars who were pioneers in the translation and transmission of texts that were hitherto unknown to the West. Scholars like Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, William Jones, Henry T. Colebrook and a few others were patronized by the efforts of Hastings to create a viable administration that would benefit the ruler and the ruled alike. There can be no doubt about the fact that the basis of their works was supplied by the very urgent interests of the management of the Company, and the domains of their interest was shaped by Warren Hastings' policy that "every accumulation of knowledge, and specially such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise a dominion founded on the right of conquest, is useful to the state: it is the gain of humanity".(6) Any discussion of early Orientalist translations of renditions should proceed from an understanding of this premise: that these scholars were working within the boundaries imposed by the administrative needs of the ruler; whether they transcended the limits imposed on them at times remains an issue to be examined.

THE TEXTS

The context of the Orientalists' effort to unearth literary treasures of the colonized people, therefore, is clearly marked by the needs and demands of the ruling power. However, while working within this framework of inquiry, these scholars did develop a strong sense of empathy for the literature and culture of the native people. In fact, while working hard to translate Sanskrit texts that were primarily targeted for an European audience, they often took the risk of alienating their own superiors. The technical difficulties and the unsurmountable barriers that faced them should not and could not be underestimated, and there is no doubt

about the fact that they were doing pioneering work in the field of cross-cultural translation or transmission. Our aim in this paper is to see their ideological affiliations in relation to what Edward Said calls "Orientalism", and therefore, we would be looking into the conceptual framework behind some of these translations, and not their stylistic qualities. It would be interesting to focus our attention on particular texts that were translated and transmitted to the West as part of the cultural legacy of the colonized people.

Edward Said offers a way of analysing the Orientalist position in a consistent manner:

Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-a-vis the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text - all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing or speaking on its behalf.(7)

When we try to discern the voice that narrates the position in these translations or representations, it would become apparent what the nature of the position is. The question therefore, will settle down to the basic problem of "free will" in a hegemonized hierarchy, an order that had set its parameters strictly and carefully in "representing" what they thought the "treasures" of the East through their work in this very early period of East-West contact.

Another point to note is the question of audience. Most of these texts were aimed generally at the European and particularly at the English audiences who were in contact with this very different culture for the first time in their history. The differences notwithstanding, there was no doubt that England had come to stay in India, and therefore, they had to equip themselves in the rudiments of English civilization and culture as represented in these works. The irony of course, is that most of these scholars were in search of the "golden age", and if that is what the English officials were being familiarized with before their departure to India, one can easily explain the chaos that was created there for two consecutive centuries beginning at the time of the Orientalists.

Let us begin with one of the earliest productions of the Orientalist school, Nathaniel Brassey Halhed's (1751-1830) *A Grammar of the Bengali Language*, published under the direct patronage of Warren Hastings in 1778, who thought that the project was "likely to be attended with great advantages to the service." Halhed was born in an affluent family of Oxfordshire on May 25, 1751; his father and grandfather were bankers of considerable wealth and renown. Nathaniel was educated at Harrow and Christ Church College, Oxford, and his close friends included Richard Brinsley Sheridan and William Jones. Halhed wrote poetry as well as farces in collaboration with Sheridan, and was planning to embark on a literary career when he left for India in 1772 to work as a writer in the Company offices in Calcutta.(9) Historians have noted that Halhed was very unlike the

other officials of the Company who were there to make a fortune by private trading; and he seems to have been hard pressed even to make a decent living among these unscrupulous colleagues of his.(10)

Halhed's first major work in compilation and translation was the famous *A Code of Gentoo Laws* (1776), which he undertook while he was working in the office of the Persian translators. This was an enormous project in which a team of eleven pundits translated twenty Sanskrit texts into Persian so that he could render them into English. Halhed had studied some Persian while at Oxford, and improved his knowledge while in India. Though the laws were translated not literally, but in a summarised format, the work made the translator famous throughout Europe for providing some information about Hindu customs and conventions. This work also became the base of English understanding of the Indian legal system, and had greater import in Europe than in India.

In the meantime however, Halhed was learning Bengali, a local vernacular not used in official transactions at that time even when it was the language in which the people communicated. Apparently, Halhed was the first Englishman to learn the language in a comprehensive manner, and was instigated by his dealings with the weavers of Bengal with whom the Company was trading. While undertaking the task of writing the grammar of the local vernacular, Halhed had in mind the needs of the East India Company traders and administrators. Hastings not only supported the project, he financed and stood as security for the printer's charges that the scholar was about to incur. On the title page of the book, Halhed wrote this small epigraph: "To enhance the knowledge of linguistics, for the benefit of the English, Halhed writes this." (See exhibit 1, translation mine) This was the second grammar of the Bengali written by an European - the first one was published from Lisbon in 1743 by Manoel da Assumpsam; it was a Bengali grammar written in Portuguese, and primarily aimed at a missionary audience. Halhed's grammar of the Bengali language was the first attempt at a secular scientific study of the language.

The author begins the work with a lengthy preface (25 pages) in which he talks about the necessity of learning the language of the region in which the British were operating. The opening sets the tone for the rest of the discourse:

The wisdom of the British Parliament has within these few years taken a decisive part in the internal policy and civil administration of its Asiatic territories; and more particularly in the kingdom in Bengal, which, by the most formal act of authority in the establishment of a Supreme Court of Justice, it has professedly incorporated with the British Empire. Much however, still remains for the completion of this grand work; and we may reasonably presume, that one of its most important desiderata is the cultivation of the right understanding and of a general medium of intercourse between the Government and its Subjects; between the natives of Europe who are to rule, and the inhabitants of India who are to

obey.(11)

After setting the parameters of the work, Halhed correctly states that even though now the status of the local vernacular is not recognized by the Europeans, there will come a time very soon when the language will become very important in the life of the people. He then goes on to trace the lineage of the language and its affiliation to other dialects across the Indian subcontinent. Pleading for the use of the local language in the transactions of the Company, Halhead writes:

The internal policy of the kingdom demands an equal share of attention; and the many impositions to which the poorer classes of people are exposed, in a country still fluctuating between the relics of former despotic dominion, and the liberal spirit of its present legislature, having long cried out for a remedy.... In short, if vigour, impartiality and despatch be required to the operation of the government, to the distribution of justice, to the collection of the revenues, and to the transactions of commerce, they are only to be secured by a proper attention to that dialect used by the body of the people; especially as it is much better calculated both for public and private affairs by its plainness, its precision and regularity of construction, than the flowery sentences and modulated periods of the Persian.

Halhed ends his Preface by discussing the difficulty of printing the Bengali alphabet for the first time, and the enormous job done by Charles Wilkins, who successfully devised a method of printing the work by combining in himself the tasks of "the Metallurgist, the Engraver, the Founder and the Printer". The success of Wilkins in preparing the Bengali script, Halhed says,

has enabled Great Britain to introduce all the more solid advantages of European literature among a people whom she has already rescued from Asiatic slavery; to promote the circulation of wealth, by giving new vigour and despatch to business, and to forward the progress of civil society by facilitating the means of intercourse. ... Even the credit of the nation is interested in marking the progress of her conquests by a liberal communication of Arts and Sciences, rather than by the effusion of blood; and policy requires that her new subjects should as well feel the benefits, as the necessity of submission. (13)

An analysis of Halhead's position on "Asiatic slavery" yields not much fruit, and it is difficult to conjecture what he was referring to when he spoke of "rescuing" the people by spreading the knowledge of European literature through the medium of Bengali. The thrust of his argument of course is clear, and as one of the earliest examples of the Orientalist effort, it sets the tone of future discourse in many ways.

Halhead deals with the grammar by dividing his chapters into discussions on the 'elements', the 'substantives', 'verbs' and other related criteria. He also takes

great pains to illustrate the present degenerate state of the language due to the continuous influx of foreign words; he imagines a "pure" Sanskrit source, a closer relation to which might have simplified his task of codifying the language. This insistence on a former "pure" and innocent state of affairs in the remote past of India which was now decayed and fallen became a dominant strain in all Orientalist efforts at reviving the ancient past of the civilization. Asish Nandy analyses this problem from the standpoint of psychology in relation to later colonial attitudes, and says that, to explain the cultural superiority of the European power that was colonizing the traditional culture, Europe had to prove that they had undertaken a glorious mission. He comments :

Newly discovered Africa, with its strong emphasis on the folk, the oral and the rural could be more easily written off as savage. It was more difficult to do so for India and China which the European Orientalists and even the first generation of rulers had studied and sometimes venerated. ... The colonial ideology handled the problem in two mutually inconsistent ways. Firstly, it postulated a clear disjunction between India's past and present. The civilised India was in the bygone past; now it was dead and museumised. The present India, the argument went, was only nominally related to its history; it was India only to the extent it was a senile, decrepit version of her once youthful, creative self. ... Secondly and paradoxically, the colonial culture postulated that India's later degeneration was not due to colonial rule--which, if anything, had improved Indian culture by fighting against its irrational, oppressive, retrogressive elements--but due to aspects of the traditional Indian culture which in spite of some good points carried the seeds of India's later cultural downfall. (14)

The germs of this argument is clearly discernible in Halhed. Even when writing a grammar of the language, he adopts the view that the Europeans, after all, are "rescuing" the natives from the fallen state. And it was clear that the Orientalist mission was to prove how degraded the present state of the culture was in comparison to the "golden age" of Sanskrit hegemony.

The fact is that, especially in Bengal, Hindu Sanskrit culture was only one aspect of the several other indigenous strands, and as noted by historians, the Brahmanic form of Hinduism came quite late (in the twelfth century) with the Sen dynasty in Bengal. (15) Recent studies in the Indian or Bengali Renaissance also see the whole movement which was closely linked to the Orientalist legacy as "Hindu elitist" and think that it was a strategy of the British to create a mythical golden age that was being resurrected by them for the "re-awakening" of the natives who have fallen into such a degrading state at present. (16)

The next Orientalist to be examined is the famous Sir William Jones (1746-94), the founder of the Asiatic Society and the translator of classical Sanskrit as well as Persian and Arabic texts to the European audience through translations

that were eagerly awaited throughout the continent. David Kopf comments :

To appreciate fully the phenomenal Orientalist rediscovery of the Hindu classical age, it is necessary to isolate those components of the European Enlightenment that predisposed the Company servants in that direction. The intellectual elite that clustered about Hastings after 1770 was classicist rather than 'progressive' in their historical outlook, cosmopolitan rather than nationalist in their view of other cultures, and rationalist rather than romantic in their quest for those 'constant and universal principles' that express the unity of human nature. (17)

While Kopf might be correct in assessing the intellectual framework of the Orientalist scholars (certainly not about all of them), his notion of discovering "universal" principles is not corroborated by the facts we have in mind.

William Jones was born into a Welsh family and was educated at Harrow and Oxford. While at Oxford, he studied the Classics before he became interested in Oriental Studies. Jones was not a socializer and he did not have any particular interest in the pastimes that occupied most of the people of his age; he spent most of his time in libraries and in his study reading. (18) He learnt Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit while in England, and wrote on Persian grammar and the history of Nadir Shah. These works made him quite famous and he was elected member of the Royal Society as a linguist and Orientalist. He was also a member of Samuel Johnson's prestigious literary club and was a close friend of Joshua Reynolds and Edmund Burke. In fact, it was Dr. Johnson who presented a copy of Jones' *A Grammar of the Persian Language* to Warren Hastings. In 1774 Jones was called to the Bar, and worked as a junior pleader, where, in spite of his erudition and knowledge of the legal systems of the world, he was not successful as a lawyer. In 1778 he was offered a post of judgeship in India by Lord Bathurst and immediately Jones turned all his attention to gathering as much information on India as he could, and soon came to be regarded as an authority on the subject. Burke was invited to talk about the notorious Bengali Bill. They shared the concern with many other Englishmen of the time that the East India Company was endangering the reputation of "freedom-loving" Britons and corrupting the British body-politic at home. His motives to go to India were manifold, and S.N. Mukherjee tells us : "He looked forward to going to India, to be able to mitigate the misery of the Indians, to purchase Oriental books and manuscripts, and to earn enough to be able to return to England to live independently." (19)

Until the arrival of Jones in Calcutta in 1783, Oriental research had been carried out by individual scholars who found in Hastings a powerful support for what they were doing. In January 1784 Jones sent out a letter expressing his desire to form a society that would go into Oriental research in a methodical way. The Asiatic Society of Bengal was established the same year. The point to note is that in spite of the fact that William Jones was a real scholar with Enlightenment values in universal brotherhood, when he entered the service with Warren

Hastings, he had to conform to the policies of his superiors and direct his energy and efforts to what appeared valuable to the outsiders in this country, and Mukherjee makes an observation which is relevant in this respect :

I think his career is important because it shows more clearly than anything else the dichotomy of the attitudes of some of the British officers in India; many were radicals at home and they were attracted by India, her 'glorious past' and her 'simple people', yet they had to uphold an authoritarian rule. Jones epitomizes this dichotomy in his life and works. (20)

Jones became the President of the Asiatic Society because Hastings declined the post in his favour, and in the Discourses that he delivered annually at the meetings of this Society in a way charts the territory of the Orientalist domain. In my effort to 'locate' the Orientalist Jones who adopts a particular voice in these discourses, the following statement seemed to express the basic premise of whatever was being done in the name of resurrecting antiquity :

Whoever travels in Asia, and especially if he be conversant with the literature of the countries through which he passes, must naturally remark the superiority of *European* talents : the observation, indeed, is at least as old as Alexander; and, though we cannot agree with the sage preceptor of that ambitious prince, that "the Asiaticks are born to be slaves", yet the *Athenian* poet seems perfectly in the right, when he represents *Europe* as a *sovereign Princess*, and *Asia* as *her Handmaid* : but, if the mistress be transcendently majestic, it cannot be denied that the attendant has many beauties, and some advantages peculiar to herself. ... and although we must be conscious of our superior advancement in all kinds of useful knowledge, yet we ought not therefore to condemn the people of Asia, from whose researches into nature, works of art, and inventions of fancy, many valuable hints may be derived for our own improvement and advantage. If that, indeed, were not the principal object of your institution, little else could arise from it but the mere gratification of curiosity ... (21)

Given the structure of understanding about matters "Asiatick", it is difficult to imagine an attitude that would not be coloured by this inherent sense of superiority and faith in the advanced nature of European civilization. In fact, Jones goes on to divide the world into two spheres, where "reason and taste are the grand prerogatives of European minds", on the other hand, "the Asiaticks have soared to loftier heights in the sphere of imagination". (22) This separation of reason and imagination is surely reminiscent of the eighteenth century ideal in England, and in many ways Jones is repeating the prevalent opinion of his time.

Jones also shared with the other Orientalists the belief in the current corrupt stage of India and a remote ancient "pure" state which they were about to unearth:

Their sources of wealth are still abundant even after so many revolutions and conquests; ... nor can we reasonably doubt, how degenerate and abased so ever the Hindus may now appear, that in some early age they were splendid in arts and arms, happy in government, wise in legislation, and eminent in various knowledge. (23)

Jones, along with Halhed before him and many others after him, clearly subscribes to the Orientalist agenda that was playing into the larger game of politics and cultural hegemony. He was full of admiration for the Sanskrit language which he thought was :

more perfect than the Greek, and more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, ... so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source ... (24)

This was Jones' great contribution to knowledge. He was the father of the discipline of Comparative Philology and was highly appreciated in Europe immediately. It is surprising, however, to note the manner in which his understanding of the culture is biased by his built-in prejudices that were common at the time. What is contradictory is that even while working within the framework of biases Jones at times praises the Indian antiquity without any restraint, and this might be the result of the authority that was imposed on all Orientalists by the needs of colonial administration. (25)

Jones' interest in legal systems of the world led him to translate the *Dharmasastra* of Manu, the original being a behaviour code written in 2685 verses, and deals with religion, law, custom and politics, dating around the second period of Indian philosophy which spans from 500 B.C. to 200 A.D. Manu's code of law was one among many such codes which were "systematic treatises concerning the conduct of life among the Aryans, describing their social organisation and their ethical and religious functions and obligations." (26) In the Preface to his translation of this work, Jones writes :

The work, now presented to the European world, contains abundance of curious matter extremely interesting both to speculative lawyers and antiquaries, with many beauties, which need not be pointed out, and with many blemishes, which cannot be justified or palliated. It is a system of despotism and priestcraft, both indeed limited by law, but artfully conspired to give mutual support, though with mutual checks ; it is filled with strange conceits in metaphysics and natural philosophy, with idle superstitions, and with a scheme of theology most obscurely figurative, and consequently liable to dangerous misconception ; it abounds with minute and childish formalities, with ceremonies generally absurd and often ridiculous ; the punishments are partial and fanciful, for

some crimes dreadfully cruel, for others reprehensibly slight ; and the very morals, though rigid on the whole, are in one or two instances ... unaccountably relaxed : nevertheless, a spirit of sublime devotion, of benevolence to mankind, and of amiable tenderness to all sentient creatures, pervades the whole work.(27)

Jones concludes the Preface with the observation that a knowledge of the work would only enhance the "political and commercial interests of Europe".

The two specific literary translations of Jones that became enormously popular in Europe are Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda*, (1792) and Kalidas's *Sakuntala*, (1789) and it would be worthwhile to see Jones' opinions regarding these texts. *Gitagovinda* is a Sanskrit "*kavya*" consisting of lyrics about the love of Radha and Krishna, written by the poet Jayadeva around the tenth or eleventh centuries. It is highly significant that Jones designates the text as "mystical" and discusses it with the mystical literature of the Sufi poets of Islam. In the Hindu tradition however, the *Gitagovinda* is mystical as well as erotic, devotional as well as intensely poetic. Jayadeva has been the source of abundant imagery of love and devotion, and Jones does not mention the fact that there is a human appeal of the lyrics which are sung by very common people in daily life. There is no Preface to the translation, and only a mention of the method he adopts for presenting this text to the European world accompanies the essay "On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and Hindus". He writes :

After having translated the *Gitagovinda* word for word, I reduced my translation to the form, in which it is now exhibited ; omitting only those passages, which are too luxuriant and too bold for an European taste, and the prefatory ode on the ten incarnations of Vishnu, with which you have been presented on another occasion: the phrases in Italicks are the burdens of the several songs ; and you may be assured, that not a single image or idea has been added by the translator.(28)

This caution in offending the "European taste" makes perfect sense, and explains the utter absence of eroticism from Jones's prose renderings of Jayadeva's songs, they are devotional prayers and mystical ideas, without any trace of the intensely lyrical love sentiments dominating the originals.

Jones tells us that he read Kalidasa's play *Sakuntala* with the help of his teacher Ramlochan, and translated the drama first into Latin and then into English. The first English translation was published in Calcutta in 1789. This was not the first Sanskrit text to be translated into an European language, but it was certainly the first text to be translated because of its literary value and not for religious or spiritual messages.

The Preface to the translation tells us how Jones chanced to know about the very popular drama of the Hindus, and how he has come to realise that the dramatic literature of these people is indeed of remarkable quality. He refused to offer any "criticism" of the characters or conduct of the play, and admitted that

"tastes of men differ as much as their sentiments and passions". He is full of praise for the accomplishments of the Sanskrit poets, and makes a very interesting statement about the civilization that produced it :

By whomsoever or in whatever age this species of entertainment was invented, it is very certain, that it was carried to great perfection in its kind, when Vikramaditya, who reigned in the first century before Christ, gave encouragement to poets, philosophers and mathematicians at a time when the Britons were as unlettered and unpolished as the army of Hanuman nine men of genius, commonly called the nine gems, attended his court, and were splendidly supported by his bounty; and Kalidas is unanimously allowed to have been the brightest of them.(29)

Critics have noted that if Jones had been "merely fascinated by primitive-ness, he would have preferred the 'unlettered Britons' to Kalidasa of Vikramaditya's court. He was charmed by the simplicity of Sakuntala the protagonist, the peacefulness of Kanva's ashram."(30) In fact this aspect of the drama was what appealed to the European romantics most, the intense bond between the human and the natural world, the dependence and penetration of one into the other.(31) Jones was successfully propagating an image of a "natural" yet "civilized" India that existed several centuries before the Europeans came to Asia. In his long "Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations", Jones speaks eloquently of Arabic and Persian poetry, and concludes by saying :

I must request, that in bestowing these praises on the writings of Asia, I may not be thought to derogate from the merit of the Greek and Latin poems, which have justly been admired in every age ; yet I cannot but think that our European poetry has subsisted too long on the perpetual repetition of the same images, and incessant allusions to the same fables : and it has been my endeavour for several years to inculcate this truth, that if the principal writings of the *Asiaticks*, which are repositied in our public libraries, were printed with the usual advantage of notes and illustrations, and if the languages of the Eastern nations were studied in the great seminaries of learning, where every other branch of useful knowledge is taught to perfection, a new and ample field would be opened for speculation ; we should have a more extensive insight into the history of the human mind ; we should be furnished with a new set of images and similitudes ; and a new set of excellent compositions would be brought to light, which future scholars might explain, and future poets might imitate. (32)

There is no doubt that even while working within the cultural policy of the East India Company, Jones was trying to look beyond the immediate interests of the present, and think in terms of human achievements. He pleads for a common repertoire of knowledge that would benefit mankind, and strives hard to prove the

antiquity and gloriousness of the Hindu civilization. In a way he is the high water mark of Orientalism — the best and sincerest specimen of the "other" trying to accommodate the identity of an alien country and civilization.

In judging Jones' work by Said's standards, one is struck by the complexity of this Orientalist, whose gaze cannot be limited to one particular ideological formula. He had to work within the parameters set by the British hegemony and he does have biases that are characteristic of his time ; but at times he reaches beyond narrow nationalistic enthusiasm to touch other cords of human endeavour, and transcends the restrictions imposed by the circumstances in which he was working. His work, therefore, is more complex in its response to the "other".

The second great Orientalist after Jones is supposed to be H.T.Colebrook (1765-1837), who came to India in 1783 at the age of eighteen. He had the unique opportunity of learning Sanskrit while residing near the holy city of Benaras, and delved deep into the "classical" civilization of India which was a corollary to his intense admiration for the classical civilization of Greece and Rome. Colebrook hated translators at first, and was proud to have avoided the translation mania of the time. He wrote in a letter : "Translations are for those who need to fill their purses." (33) But very soon he realized that the advancement of Oriental Studies in Europe depended entirely on the availability of translated material, and his first major work was the four volume translation, *A Digest of Hindu Law on Contracts and Successions*, which immediately established his reputation as one of the best European Sanskrit scholars of the day.

The repeated translation of Hindu legal codes were necessitated by the British desire to familiarize themselves with the customs and conventions of the country which they were ruling, and almost all Orientalists started with some efforts at providing their employers with the information they needed. Colebrook soon branched off to other areas, and his interest in scientific literature led him to study the Hindu system of mathematics and astronomy. We would examine some of his essays to situate him in the map of Orientalism.

We can begin with a late address delivered at a meeting of the Royal Asiatic Society of England, where Colebrook voices a common concern of the Orientalists working in India :

To those countries of Asia, in which civilization may be justly considered to have had its origin, or to have attained its earliest growth, the rest of the civilized world owes a large debt of gratitude, which it cannot but be solicitous to repay ; and England as most advanced in refinement, is for that very cause, the most beholden ; and, by acquisition of dominion in the East, is bound by yet a closer tie. As Englishmen, we participated in the earnest wish that this duty may be fulfilled, and that obligation requited; and we share in the anxious desire of contributing to such a happy

result, by promoting an interchange of benefits, and returning in

an improved state that which was received in a ruder form.(34)

In this short extract, Colebrook touches most of the major features of academic Orientalism: the relation between the old civilization of India and the present world, the British need to know local conditions better even when they are the "most advanced in refinement" in the world, and the present degraded state of the country which they were rescuing from the mire of decay. Colebrook goes on to say that the most important characteristic of "the arts" in Asia is "simplicity", and an enquiry into the means and methods of these would certainly benefit the Europeans who might learn something from the other.(35)

The essay discusses the relevance of Asiatic studies to the modern world, and Colebrook urges his listeners to research into the materials that were being brought to Britain by those posted in India. He comments :

Remote as are the regions to which our attention is turned, no country enjoys greater advantages than Great Britain for conducting inquiries respecting them. Possessing a great Asiatic empire, its influence extends far beyond its direct local authority.(36)

The argument goes on to prove that Englishmen who come back from India should study the manuscripts that were brought from that country for their own benefit and for the enhancement of future "prosperity" of the English people. In the extremely long essay "On the Philosophy of the Hindus", Colebrook studies the different schools of Hindu philosophy with a remarkable objectiveness, and it is almost impossible to find an instance where he passes a value judgement in comparing the Western and Eastern schools of philosophy. He does however, end the essay with a promise to write another on the close relationship between the Hindu and Greek philosophy, and critics have pointed out that Orientalists consistently did that to naturalize the Hindu in the European scheme of things.

In his Preface to the Digest of Indian Law, Colebrook quotes William Jones to prove the usefulness of translating legal treatises, they were, both Jones and Colebrook agree, the foundation of a better administration in India. He ends the Preface by saying :

It has become my part to complete a translation of the New Digest of Indian Law. Selected for this duty by Sir John Shore, whose attention extended to promote the happiness of the native inhabitants of the provinces which he governs, and to encourage the labours of the literary society over which he presides, is no less conspicuous than his successful administration of the British interests in India, I have cheerfully devoted my utmost endeavours to deserve the choice by which I was honoured;....(37)

This continuous harping on the pragmatic nature of their work is a consistent feature of the Orientalist gaze, and makes sense because these scholars were working for the British government and were not there on their own or on the initiative of the colonized people.

The early Orientalists, as is obvious from the above discussion, were fasci-

nated with the Sanskrit language and had not much interest in the local vernacular even when Halhed had pleaded eloquently on behalf of the Bengali language in the Preface to his Grammar of the language. The work of continuing Halhed's pioneering efforts was taken up by William Carey, who came to Bengal in 1793 and became a devoted student of the local vernacular. The Baptist Mission at Serampore, which was a Danish settlement at the time, was the place where this missionary lived and worked until he was offered a post in the newly established Fort William College - the institution where British civil servants were to be trained in local languages and customs. The Government of India had banned Missionary activity, and Carey was hard pressed for money and resources for the work that he and his colleagues wanted to do. A reconciliation was reached when Carey was offered a position in Wellesley's "Oxford of the East" and the missionaries agreed to help the institution with their support and expertise in exchange of lucrative rewards. According to David Kopf, the college became the centre of institutionalised research on Oriental matters, and now the introduction of the vernacular languages into the curriculum gave impetus to the study of popular culture. Kopf also mentions that many of the Baptist missionaries who came to Serampore were suspects in England for their sympathy towards the French Revolution and democratic principles.(38) Carey's association with the College and with the British governor general ultimately led to the acceptance of missionary activities in Bengal and in other parts of India. In his first speech as the Principal of the Fort William College (he succeeded Colebrook to the post), delivered on September 29, 1804, Carey said :

The rising importance of our Collegiate Institution has never been more clearly demonstrated than on the present occasion; and thousands of the learned in distant nations will exult in this triumph of Literature.... The Coloquial Hindoostanee, the classic Persian, the commercial Bengalee, the learned Arabic, and the primaeval Shanscrit, are spoken fluently, after having been studied grammatically by English youths. Did ever any University in Europe, or any literary institution in any other age or country exhibit a scene so interesting as this?...Were the institution to cease from this moment, its salutary effects would yet remain. Good has been done, which cannot be undone. Sources of useful knowledge, moral instruction and political utility, have been opened to the natives of India which can never be closed; and their civil improvement, like the gradual civilization of our own country, will advance in progression for ages to come.(39)

Carey as the Professor of Bengali and Sanskrit, was faced with the task of writing text-books for students. He published in 1801 *A Grammar of the Bengali Language*, and this was the third book of its kind. His Dictionary was published in 1825, and is perhaps the first dictionary to be available to an English audience who were learning Bengali. In the Preface, Carey pleads in favour of the learning

of the local vernacular :

Till of late the Bengalee language was almost wholly neglected by Europeans, under the idea of its being a mere jargon, only used by the lower orders of people. Most of the vernacular languages of India lie still lie under the same neglect, from a supposition that the Hindoostanee is the language universally prevailing, and that the language of the body of the inhabitants is to be considered as a vulgar corruption thereof, assuming an almost endless number of local varieties.... The want of a Dictionary of Bengalee language has long been felt, especially by the students in the College of Fort William. Induced by this acknowledged want, and by the official situation which he holds in that College, and which indeed seemed to require it of him, the author of this work engaged therein, and now, after many delays, presents it to the public.(40)

Carey, like Halhed before him, stresses the need to learn the local language for a successful British administration of the empire, and dispells the notion that there was no local vernacular worth studying after all. In the body of the Dictionary, Carey introduces each letter of the Bengali alphabet as "Hindoo alphabet".(See exhibit 2) There seems to be no distinction in his mind between Bengali and Hindu, which is of course a gross misrepresentation of the state of affairs and is reminiscent of the early Orientalist identification of India with Hinduism.

Carey's Dictionary seems to be remarkably free of the kind of semantic arbitrariness of Dr Johnson's work, and he rarely passes judgements on the content of words. There are a few comments that show his position to be that of an outsider, but as a whole, the work is not biased towards any particular group. Take, for instance, his explanation for the Bengali word "Padmini", which is derived from Sanskrit roots. Carey says :

Padmini, (from Padma, the water lily), an assemblage of water lilies, a description of women in the amatory writings of the Hindoos, viz. those who have eyes resembling the water-lily, curled hair, plump and firm breasts, who speak truth, and have the scent of Nelumbium.(41)

What Carey describes as the "amatory" writings of the Hindus is actually the whole body of classical Sanskrit literature where beautiful women are consistently compared to the lotus or water-lily. These observations however, are very minor and rare in the Dictionary, and Carey does not pass judgements on customs of local people while defining a term that denotes beliefs or rituals among the Hindus or Muslims of the country. One finds descriptions such as "credulous Hindoos"(42), but they are extremely rare considering the extent of the work.

In 1812, Carey published *Itihasmala*, or an anthology of narratives. For some unknown reason, this collection of fables was not publicised or popularised as it should have been. The work was compiled as a tool to language instruction

among the students of the Fort William College, and did not aim at literary polish. The stories are popular fables with a moral attached to them and critics think that Carey had a minor role to play in the production of this work, which was largely done by his Bengali assistants in the College. He, however, is still regarded as the father of Bengali prose, and without his consistent efforts at popularizing the local vernacular among the British, we would have seen a different picture today.

We should remember that Carey was above all a missionary, and his entire life was devoted to the ultimate aim of converting "heathens"; his mastery of the local language was part of a larger scheme of evangelical mission to save humanity. In the pamphlet titled *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of Heathens*, published in London in 1792 before he came to India, Carey clearly defines his position regarding the mission's activity. He comments that not knowing the language of a heathen country should not be an excuse for failure to convert, the missionaries should devote themselves to learning the local language as soon as they get to the foreign country.(43) An excerpt from the pamphlet shows the missionary spirit quite clearly:

The Missionaries must be men of great piety, prudence, courage, and forbearance; of undoubted orthodoxy in their sentiments, and must enter with all their hearts into the spirit of their mission; they must be willing to leave all the comforts of life behind them, and to encounter all the hardships of a torrid, or a frigid climate, an uncomfortable manner of living and every other inconvenience that can attend this undertaking. Clothing, a few knives, powder and shot, fishing tackle, and the articles of husbandry above-mentioned, must be provided for them; and when arrived at their place of destination, their first business must be to gain some acquaintance with the language of the natives,... They must endeavour to convince them that it was their good alone, which induced them to forsake their friends, and all the comforts of their native country.(44)

Carey uses the metaphor of trade to convince his brethren that they should exert themselves as much as merchants in trading companies do to make a profit, and compares his newly established Baptist Mission to a "Company". He also reminds his colleagues that missionaries were to be chosen with utmost care, so that their fate abroad does not resemble that of the Dutch East India Company, whose missionaries were tempted by "temporal gain", and who, instead of "preaching to the poor Indians", sought material benefits from their mission. All this concern for the missionary activity in Bengal explains partly Carey's involvement with the Bengali language and his efforts to disseminate it among the Englishmen of his time. His *Bengali Hymn Book*, published from the Serampore Mission Press in 1804 is the proof of his pragmatic programme and his missionary agenda.

The early Orientalists form a distinct group within themselves, and the best

representatives are the few whose works we reviewed in some detail. Their work was carried on by Orientalists in many countries of Europe, and the study of the East became a source for the renewed interest in romantic philosophy and literature. Different periods of scholarship have their own agendas, and we would examine two scholars who devoted their lives to the study of Sanskrit and Hindu philosophy at a later period. We would look into the work of a translator and a scholar to find their intellectual affiliations in dealing with the Orient.

Sir Monier-William was the Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University, and his book *Hinduism* was published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in 1877.(45) The reputed scholar gives detailed accounts of the schools of Indian philosophy and their present state in the country. His ideological biases become evident when he comes to the discussion of modern conditions, that is, conditions prevailing at the time he was working on the subject. While enumerating the Hindu system of idol-worship and caste, he concludes:

The ancient fortress of Hinduism, with its four sides, Monotheism, Pantheism, Dualism, and Polytheism, is everywhere tottering and ready to fall. Let not Christianity undervalue its obligations to education, which has, so to speak, served as a mighty lever for upheaving the massive fabric of the Hindu system. But the education we are giving in India has little effect on the heart, and has certainly no power to regenerate it. What then is to become of the masses of the people when their ancient faith sinks from beneath their feet? Only two other homes are before them - a cold theism and a heart-stirring Christianity. They are both already established in the soil of India. But Christianity is spreading its boundaries more widely, and striking its foundations more deeply. It appeals directly to the heart. It is exactly suited to the needs of the masses of people of India. In Christianity alone is their true home.(46)

In fact, it was kind of disappointing and frustrating to read this famous Sanskritist identify himself with Christian missionaries so completely, and this obviously raises the question of the nature of scholastic enquiry in relation to Orientalism. Even when not working for a government that was administering the natives, Monier-Williams assumes the role of the saviour among the fallen Hindus, and urges the Christians to intensify their efforts in winning the idolatrous Hindu. He says :

Nothing less is demanded of us Englishmen, to whose charge the Almighty has committed the souls and bodies of two hundred and forty millions of His creatures, than that every man among us, whether clerical or lay, should strive to be a missionary according to the standard set up by the first great Missionary - Christ himself. Let no lower standard of our duty satisfy us. So will the good time arrive when not only every ear shall have heard the good news of

the reconciliation of man to his Maker, but every tongue also of every native of India - from Cape Comorin to the Himalaya mountains - shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father.(47)

This mighty mission of the Englishmen found its voice in the mightiest of scholarly citadels, and enriched the work of the Orientalists who were familiarising the West with the unknown East.

The work of Friedrich Max Muller (1823-1900) was appearing almost at the same time, and he undertook the enormous task of translating religious literature of the East in a series entitled "The Sacred Books of the East". He also guided considerable research in Indology, Comparative Religion, and Mythology. Though a German scholar who had studied under the French Orientalist Burnouf, he spent most of his working life in England at Oxford after 1848. He was a master of languages and an eminent classical scholar who was blocked from succeeding to the Chair of Sanskrit at Oxford because of his foreign birth and liberal views on theological questions. The post was offered to Monier-Williams instead. In 1868, Max Muller was appointed to the newly established Chair of Comparative Philosophy, and his influence on Indological studies has been deep and extensive.

In reading the Prefaces to the translations of the *Upanishads*, one can easily detect a difference in Max Muller's approach to the Orient from many of the other Orientalists of his time. He pleads for "accurate, complete, and unembellished versions of some of the sacred books of the East." These alone will enable people to form a correct estimate of the world's religions. He writes:

We want to know the ancient religions such as they really were, not such as we wish they should have been. We want to know, not their wisdom only, but their folly also; and while we must learn to look up to their highest points where they seem to rise nearer to heaven than anything we were acquainted with before, we must not shrink from looking down into their stony tracts, their dark abysses, their muddy moraines, in order to comprehend both the height and the depth of the human mind in its searchings after the Infinite.(48)

Muller's gaze seems to be free of any particular ideological agenda, and he persistently harps on the fact that to pursue a proper study of the religions of the world, one must produce translations that do not follow any particular programme except faithfulness to the original. He maintains that when faced with a dilemma in rendering ancient thought into a modern language, the translator will "hardly hesitate in his choice between two evils. He will prefer to do some violence to language rather than to misrepresent old thoughts by clothing them in words which do not fit them."(49) He insists that these texts cannot be judged from "without" and even though it is not necessary to become a Brahman or a Buddhist to comprehend them, one has to dispell biases that might hinder from a correct assessment of their nature. What Max Muller says in this context seems to be the purest programme in any study of the Orient, and explains his singularity as a

scholar. He says:

We cannot separate ourselves from those who believed in these sacred books. There is no specific difference between ourselves and the Brahmans, the Buddhists, the Zoroastrians, or the Taosze. Our powers of perceiving, of reasoning, and of believing may be more highly developed, but we cannot claim the possession of any verifying power or of any power of belief which they did not possess as well. Shall we say then that they were forsaken of God, while we were His chosen people? God forbid! There is much, no doubt, in the sacred books which we should tolerate no longer, though we must not forget that there are portions in our own sacred books, too, which many of us would wish to absent, which, from the earliest ages of Christianity, have been regretted by theologians of undoubted piety, and which often prove a stumblingblock to those who have been won over by our missionaries to the simple faith of Christ.(50)

With this kind of an equalising glance, it is obvious and natural that Max Muller was denied the Chair of Sanskrit at Oxford! In his translations of the sacred books, he remains consistently above sectarianism, and tries to discern the valuable in them, which, he thought, would benefit the entire world in the long run. He is still regarded in India as a true Indologist who was not bent on proving inferiority or superiority, but in the presentation of texts alone.

To conclude our study of some of the Orientalist works that appeared during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, one might easily detect the presence of certain dominant ideological biases in most of the scholarly productions especially during the early period. Given the parameters of their activity and the political issues that were intimately linked to their efforts, one might venture to say that they were working within their contexts and were bound by historical forces which were impossible to transcend. The intermixing of several agendas (political, religious, commercial) complicated their response to the "Other" that they sought to represent to the West, and it is extremely difficult to imagine a situation where they would have acted differently. Max Muller is exceptional, and that illustrates how exception proves the rule.

Notes

1. D.P. Singhal, *India and World Civilization* (Michigan State University Press, 1969), in two volumes; Vol. II., p. 196. Henceforth referred to as *India and World Civilization*.

2. Percival Spear, *A History of India* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 85.

3. See Spear, pp. 85-87.

4. Gauri Visvanathan, "The Beginnings of English Literary Study in India", in *Oxford Literary Review*, Vol. 9, Nos. 1-2, 1987, pp. 2-26.

5. Visvanathan, *Ibid*, p. 5.

6. Letter of Hastings to N. Smith, Quoted in David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California

Press, 1969), p. 89.

7. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, Vintage Books, 1979), p. 20.

8. Quoted in the Introduction to *A Grammar of the Bengali Language* (Unabridged Fascimile Edition from the First Edition of 1778, Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1980), p. 8.

9. Some Historians conjecture that Halhed left England heartbroken because he was jilted by Miss Elizabeth Ann Linley, a famous singer at that time, in favour of his close friend Sheridan.

10. Nikhil Sarkar talks about the situation of Halhed, and quotes from the Fort William India House Correspondence where the writer comments: "the healthy, the luxurious and the lucrative India" was "so exceedingly ruined" that he could not "procure even a decent subsistence". In the introduction to the fascimile Edition of *A Grammar of the Bengali Language*, p.10.

11. Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, Preface to *A Grammar of the Bengali Language*, p. ii.

12. *Ibid*, p. XVII.

13. *Ibid*, p. XXV.

14. Asish Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 17-18.

15. See David Kopf, "The Idea of Self in Countertraditions of Bengali Hinduism" in *Designs of Selfhood* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1984).

16. Sumit Sarkar analyses this phenomenon rigorously in his essay "Rammohun Roy and the Break with the Past" in his *A Critique of Colonial India* (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1985). While discussing the role of Rammohun Roy, considered to be the pioneer of the so-called "Renaissance", Sarkar comments: "Rammohan's writings and activities do signify a kind of break with the traditions inherited by his generation. This break, however, was of a limited and deeply contradictory kind. It was achieved mainly on the intellectual plane and not at the level of basic social transformation; and the 'renaissance' culture which Rammohan inaugurated inevitably remained confined within a Hindu-elitist and colonial (one might almost add comprador) framework." p. 1.

17. David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, p. 22.

18. For a complete picture of Jones' life, see *Oriental Jones*, by S.N. Mukherjee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

19. *Ibid*, p. 48.

20. *Ibid*, p. 3.

21. William Jones, *The Works of William Jones* (London: John Stockdale and John Walker, 1807, in 13 Vols) Vol. 3, p. 12.

22. *Ibid*, p. 15.

23. *Ibid*, p. 32.

24. *Ibid*, p. 34.

25. *Ibid*, see pp. 44-45.
26. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, Eds, *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton: N.J. Princeton University Press, 1957), Introduction, p. XIX.
27. *Works*, Vol. 7, p. 88.
28. Jones, *Works*, Vol. 7, p. 235.
29. Jones, *Works*, Vol. 9, p. 368.
30. Mukherjee, *Oriental Jones*, p. 115.
31. The German Romantics based their appreciation of the Orient to a large extent on this text. See Amos Leslie Wilson's *A Mythical Image: The Ideal of India in German Romanticism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1964).
32. Jones, *Works*, Vol. 10, pp. 359-60.
33. Colebrook's letter to F.M. Müller, *Biographical Essays* (London: Longmans, 1884), p. 233.
34. H.T. Colebrook, "Discourse read at the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland", March 15, 1823; in *Miscellaneous Essays in 3 Volumes*; Vol. 1, p. 389.
35. *Ibid*, p. 390.
36. *Ibid*, p. 394.
37. *Ibid*, Vol. 2, p. 474.
38. David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, pp. 72-73.
39. *Ibid*, p. 90.
40. William Carey, *A Dictionary of the Bengali Language* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1981 reprint from the original published in 1825), pp. V-VII.
41. *Ibid*, Vol. II, p. 802.
42. *Ibid*, Vol. II, p. 1110.
43. William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations to Use Means for the Conversion of Heathens* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press Ltd., 1792). New Facsimile Edition with Introduction by Ernst A. Payne, 1962, p. 74-75.
44. *Ibid*, p. 75.
45. Monier-Williams, *Hinduism* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1877). Part of a larger series on Non-Christian Religious Systems.
46. *Ibid*, pp. 184-185.
47. *Ibid*, p. 186.
48. Friedrich Max Müller, tr., *The Upanishads* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962) Reprint: Clarendon Press, 1879; Introduction, p. XX.
49. *Ibid*, p. XXVII.
50. *Ibid*, p. XXXVII.

Class Consciousness, Theatre and Politics : The Bengali Theatre in the Nineteenth Century

Himani Bannerji

Ajab Shahar Kolkata
Ranri bari juri gari
Micche kathar ki keta
Hetha ghunte pore
Gobar hashe
Balihari sabhyata !

The Owl's Skit, Kali Prasanna Sinha, Calcutta, 19th century.

What a strange city, this Calcutta
Whores, mansions, carriages and horses,
What finesse in lies !
While the chowchip burns and the coudung laughs,
Bravo our civilization !

(My translation - literal.)

The problematization of political theatre requires that we try to assess the role played by cultural activities, in particular theatre, in the development of the social subjectivity or common sense of classes, in terms of how these activities organize and express the existing social relations and the forms of class struggle. More specifically, we will attend to the theatre practices of the middle classes of 19th century Bengal as part and parcel of their assumption of hegemony in the production of culture and politics.

The political content of theatre in Bengal is a part of the development of a hegemonic status for the middle classes that allows them to represent first the

province and then the nation as a whole. The process is impossible without becoming socially hegemonic, that is, without assuming a moral and ideologically directive role for all the other classes, i.e., society as a whole.(1) In building this social hegemony, cultural production (both in the process of production and through the final product) plays an important role. As such the new theatre's origin in, and full socialization to, capitalism mirrors the formation of the new classes in Bengal, and Bengal's own socialization to the distant industrial capitalism of Britain. Theatre accomplishes the task of social reproduction of class through its specific representational forms, by its intimate connection to the overall social relations, and the ideological development of Calcutta society of the time. This becomes apparent in the first social phase of this theatre, when, unlike in its later phase, it had no economic dimension to it.

The first of this paper deals with the indirectly political aspect of this theatre, up to 1872. Here we emphasize its socially organizing features, since at this stage political parties were absent and political ideologies were not developed as such. What we find is that local and European theatrical and ideological elements exist within the formation in various states of tension, contradiction or fusion. For this purpose we must note that what has come to be called "theatre" in West Bengal or India, is a particular genre of the dramatic arts, whose roots lie in English or European theatre.(2) The second part of the paper, from 1872 onwards, concentrates on the formation of public and national theatre and deals with the more complex situation of directly political involvement of theatre in the context of the growing nationalist politics, along with its indirectly political aspects, which continue to exist as a substrata of the directly political theatre and modulate its politics as a whole.

The ancient Indian theatre, codified and canonized by Bharata Muni in the *Natyaśāstra*, including in its scope all the performing arts, self-consciously held up to itself a cosmology, a world order, from which it claimed its origin and which it upheld.(3) Inscribed with the hierarchies of a class (and caste) society, these theatre arts, both in theory and practice, accommodated the normative principles of a whole society. Not so the new Bengali theatre, which arose suddenly and dramatically, among a section of the society, the new middle classes, which being organic to the colonial capital and its state, were breaking away from the older social modes and whose self-definition encompassed both disjunction and continuity. If the new theatre too referred to a world order or an epistemology and expressed social, political hierarchies, they were not that of a whole society, besides they were implied and not apparent to the practitioners. If this theatre went beyond its immediate social purview, that was certainly not the intention of the new classes. At this point of origin - both of their own and that of the theatre - they were only conscious of their own exclusive, particular, social and cultural needs. This theatre developed out of the awareness of the new classes that they were disruptive of an older social order and in need of comprehensively binding social and cultural practices and ideologies. They experienced the need for new

cultural forms, different ways of expressing and organizing pleasures and leisures. That their social views or cultural forms would become, at some point in Bengal's history, the ruling ideas and practices of other classes and thus become the standard forms and norms of Bengali culture and politics, is something that they realized and achieved only gradually.

We will once more begin by identifying the political process with those conscious and unconscious social practices which either consolidate or challenge the existing class relations, and as such are themselves decentred or centred and explicit and social terms and forms of power. These we must consider as part and parcel of class struggle, which are aimed either at developing towards or maintaining (it is always an unstable equilibrium) hegemony. Thus if we think of theatre in terms of class struggle and social subjectivity, as in relation to other socio-cultural activities then we can see the importance of theatre (or other cultural activities) in creating practices and ideas which organize some semblance of internal coherence of a class, though not complete homogeneity, as well as mediate the relation between classes either for the purpose of domination or resistance. This internal and external organization of social relations, in terms of norms and forms of those social classes, are two signal moments of class struggle. It follows from this that social relations of classes have to be organized *socially*, that is, practicalized and mediated *culturally*. This is essential to the social process as concrete existence. After all the economic relations cannot be depended upon to organize these social relations automatically.

To redefine class as social rather than as solely economic relations is also to realize that not only is that political which claims to be so. Only by taking such a stance can we implant the cultural process within the political process. This enables us to go behind and beyond what is conventionally called political, so that we can begin to realize the full import of direct and indirect forms of politics. Seen thus, sites and forms of class struggle become complex and manifold. Social forms which are elaborated from the social being of classes, which are relatively passive, and others which are though highly mediated, articulatedly ideological, all become "political" forms. Theatre, we shall see, can be political at both of these levels of active and passive, of direct and indirect politics. The passive level cannot be underestimated, because it must be noted that in order for theatre to be directly political, in an essential rather than an instrumental way, it must be effective at a very basic social level -- possessing both an expressive and an organizing dimension. In assessing political theatre we must move beyond the merely "political" use of it, to the political implications of theatrical activity itself, establishing the fact that the relationship between theatre and politics is neither accidental nor extraneous. We should not deny political significance to all other theatre except that which has what is known as "political" themes. To adopt such a standpoint is to deny or undervalue the political dimension of the formal and representational aspects of theatre, and emphasize only the so-called "content", that is the narrative at its face value. "Separating" (not "specifying") base from

superstructure, cultural production from social being, is useless for any real understanding of what actually happens in either a social or a political process. This is why form (in both senses) and content of a theatre are inseparable in a study of formation and struggle. (4) With these points in mind we should now return to my project, which is an attempt to discover the direct and indirect politics of the theatre in the organization of class- consciousness and class struggle in Bengal.

The very first recorded instance of Bengali theatre is to be found in 1795 in a production mounted by a Russian emigre, Gerasim Lebedeff. (5) But since this was an isolated attempt, the history of Bengali theatre begins with a performance at the house of a wealthy landlord and businessman, Bahoo Prasannakumar Thakur, in 1831. The first phase of Bengali theatre consists of reworking the English theatre form, both in the structure of the play and its presentational devices, in order to suit specifically new social and aesthetic needs. The performance at the house of Prasannakumar Thakur was the starting point of numerous such performances, of the establishment of a new social and aesthetic custom, with its own norms.

By beginning our periodization from 1831 and ending in 1943, we could roughly divide the theatre time in Bengal in the following stages, on which Bengali theatre historians themselves, with some quibbles, have come to a consensus :

The first period of private amateur productions (1830-68) produced in wealthy households, with attendance by invitation; amateur production in schools but coached by English teachers and conducted in English.

The second period of professional, public theatre (1868-1883) of no fixed location, with attendance secured by the sale of tickets, but non-profit ;

The final period of developed commercial theatre (1883-1943), with fixed locations and permanent stages, financiers, and paid professional actors of both sexes and not as hitherto - only male, and fixed locations with permanent stages.(6)

Some of the notable aspects of the older type of amateur theatre are: (a) the private, home based location of these theatres ; (b) the physically temporary structure of the attempted proscenium stage ; (c) non-professional directors, producers and actors - the word professional being extended to cover not only wage-earners but regular practitioners of the art ; (d) absence of women on the stage; and finally, (e) the absence of a general practice of ticket selling or public admission. These are the obviously important features of these theatres, but what is more important is the factor which lies behind them all - that of class - which made it at all possible to be amateurs on this scale and hold major shows at home. All these theatres were a part of the life-style of the richest of the new rich in Bengali society. These wealthy gentlemen, who were often titled Rajas as a mark of social and financial distinction, were able to pay for the lavish cost of

production of the theatres and competed with each other in this. They were also able to involve and patronize the less wealthy, but the new highly educated, genteel Bengali intellectual elite and professionals. Quite often the playwright himself did not belong to the world of the rich. The Brahmin scholar Ramnarayan Tarkaratna, or the prodigal son of the rich fallen into bad times, such as Madhusudan Dutta, or the functionary of the new state, such as Dinabandhu Mitra are examples in point. Bengali theatre at this time was what could be called a high-society activity, reinforced by the contribution of a modest middle class new intellectual elite.

At this pre-commercial stage when organized politics had not yet developed, theatre's import as a class activity becomes most palpable from literature, social and literary histories, which do not discuss them as performing arts but rather as social events. Memoirs, letters, and descriptive passages in fiction from this time all point to a new social ambience and interactions which were the essence of these private, home-based performances. The following description is an instance of what such theatre could have meant to the producing and consuming community:

At that time children did not get to share, not even from afar, the good times of the adults. If one mustered enough courage to get closer, one would be told, "go and play now." On the other hand if the children made too much noise during their games, you would be told "Be quiet." Not that the grown ups had their own fun too quietly either! That is why, sometimes like windblown fountain sprays some of it sprinkled onto us. I used to lean over the bannisters of this building and stare at the house next to us. You could see the dance hall next door was flooded with light. The big gate to the compound was crowded with huge horse drawn carriages. Our older brothers and cousins could be seen greeting the guests at the front door and escorting them in. Rose water was sprinkled from silver containers, and each guest was given a small bouquet. At times you could hear the sobbing of the *Kulin* women from the plays that were being put on but the meaning of this weeping eluded us. There was a strong urge to know more, to know the reasons as to why she wept so. We also heard that the person who wept thus, so loud, was undeniably a *Kulin*, but also our brother -in-law.

In those days men and women occupied opposite sides of the family boundaries, just as did the adults and the children. While in the reception room, under chandeliers and lamps, music and dancing continued, and the grown up males pulled on the long and coiled hookah pipes, the women were hidden behind bamboo blinds, in a dim light with their own containers of betel leaves and areca nuts. Women from other families also came as guests and

gathered there [to watch the show]. But they also discussed in whispers their household affairs. The children were in bed by this time, with Peary or Shankario telling them stories. Sometimes though, you could hear the snatch of a song drifting in -- "the moon light blooms like flowers!" (7)

Thus Rabindranath Tagore, the child of one of the wealthiest and most westernized-liberal families of Bengal whose home was one of the earliest sites of Bengali theatre. Here he etched in fine lines the echoes of household theatrical entertainments. What these private shows meant for the new rich who hosted and acted in them (which they initiated, moved by the life-style of British residents), in terms of the cohesion, assertion and fullness of social life, comes out in the delicate description of a child's world which is contained like a small cell in the greater social honey-comb. It is revealing of the general social setting in its taking-for-granted this world of grownups and their entertainments. In fact it is in this fallout effect of the theatre as a social pageant, that we see the emerging class consciousness of a section of the new ruling classes; much more so than even any play's content could reveal to us. We can see the formed character and the formative impact of this social world as well. Thus a full, busy world of music, lights, and role playing -- the transformation of brothers-in-law into *Kulin* women -- all left their indelible marks on Rabindranath and many others. When they came of age, they themselves wrote plays and musicals, and staged many such private, and eventually public theatricals.

Theatre's capacity of social networking or organizing social relations also comes out well from the available theatre histories of the period. Each one of these private performances brought together important sections of the local elite, and on occasion the English ruling elite. In the performance of 1831, for example, the audience consisted of the Chief Justice Sir Edward Ryan, Colonel H.H. Wilson, Raja Radhakanto Deb and many other dignitaries. As for the performance in 1835 of *Vidyasundar* :

The house was crowded by upwards of a thousand visitors, of all sorts, Hindus, Mohammadans and some Europeans and East Indians, who were all equally delighted.(8)

The producers of amateur theatre were always and necessarily discriminatory towards their audience. As quoted from Mahendranath Mukhopadhyay's memoirs, we can see the discrimination at work:

An amusing incident gave rise to strong criticism in the newspapers. When the invited gentlemen were showing their tickets on their way into the theatrical precincts, at that time a man stood by sizing up the clothes of the guests and shouted out, "Sir, front seat!", "Sir, side seat!" at every person. (9)

Another way of regulating the audience consisted of discriminating about the distribution of the guest cards. There was a decision made to invite only those who could qualify as knowledgeable audience. "At this many people showed up

three or four days before the night of the show with their certificates to prove their knowledgeability." (10) Needless to say, those who possessed such certificates were securely middle class, and probably nobody who belonged to the wealthy and elite section of the community would have been turned away. The risk of upsetting them would have been too great. It is not an exaggeration to say that well into the phase of commercial theatre, there were probably no major intellectuals of Bengal who had not come in contact with theatre. The lesser members of the society contented themselves with the folk plays or jattras and other forms of entertainment, while theatre regaled the wealthy and the intelligentsia. As Sunilkumar Chattopadhyay wrote in "Hundred Years of Bengali Natyashala":

Public theatre in Calcutta did not evolve from Yatra. Rather, the fact that it did not, gave it the passport of being regarded as something of superior culture and therefore supportable without reservation by the enlightened gentry of Calcutta hundred years ago. (11)

After the initiation of the public theatre (1872 and after), attendance to the theatre included large numbers from the lower middle class who, in spite of being familiar with it, hitherto had little or no access to it.

This world of new social entertainment, seen by Rabindranath in the 1860s or 1870s had a much older history. From 1831-1872, in the years approximately designated as years of amateur, private theatre, its main political activity was indirect and social in producing class specific socio-cultural activities. Its ideological role was inarticulate as such, yet powerful and pervasive. Theatre at home, and theatre in general, was beginning to be seen as a natural extension of a life style of the gentry of the new urban environment. Among a section of the rising classes, such as in the huge joint family of the Thakurs, this life style not only included the production of culture, but was itself generally aestheticized. The fuller aesthetic import of this semi-feudal (aristocratic) bourgeois living is again captured beautifully by the reminiscing Rabindranath. It fused the objects, values and practices of the gracious life-style of both Bengal and England :

Then came a piano in that room on that terrace. And in came modern, polished, shiny furniture from Boubazar. Chests heaved with pride! The modern, cheap high life of the nouveau riche, glittering in the eyes of the poor!

Now opened the fountain of my songs. Jyotidada ran his fingers at a furious pace, resoundingly on the keyboard of the piano, creating new melodies and kept me at his side. My job was to find the words which would capture that run away tune.

When the evening came there were mats and cushions on the terrace - jasmine garlands on a silver platter, a tumbler of cold water with ice, and scented betel leaves in a bronze container.

Then my sister-in-law would come upstairs - after completing her

toilet and coiffured. Jyotidada came with a light shawl thrown over his shoulder, touched the bow on to the strings of a violin, and I began to sing at a high key. The little tunefulness with which the maker had endowed me had not yet been taken away. So my songs spread over the surrounding rooftops and vanished into a sunset sky.

My sister-in-law had converted the terrace into a complete garden. Rows of palm trees in huge bronze pots, jasmines, gardenias, tuberose, oleanders, dolan-champa, were scattered everywhere, she never worried a moment about damaging the roof. In those days people were such dreamers! (12)

At its very inception when the life of the middle classes, were socially speaking at an embryonic stage, these private theatricals were heralded as the sign of the new times, and discussed seriously in the contemporary reviews rather than being considered as the eccentricities of a few rich families. The combination of encouragement, envy and emulation shows how this new form was an essential aspect of civilized (westernized upper class) life in Calcutta. A letter from Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay's anthology *Sambadpatre Sekaler Kutha* (The Story of the Olden Times in the Newspapers), may be quoted in this respect:

18 January, 1832, 2nd *Magh* 1238... The directors of that Hindu theatre, by not beginning their theatrical ventures with *Julius Caesar*, or any other poesies of the immortal Shakespeare, but rather choosing a drama from this country, namely *Uttaramac-arita*, to begin with, committed a mistake. If they had begun with *Julius Caesar*, or Shakespeare's stories, then those unreasonable addicts of our own types of *Jatra*, could not have any opportunity to scold them; simply because they know nothing about this kind of *kavya* [poesies]. But having heard that there will be no play on the theme of Rama's life, they thought it was to be a *Ramajatra* and began to make a lot of noise. But be that as it may, we ourselves are greatly gratified by witnessing a theatre of our own countrymen, and we hope that the founders and their sympathizers will be sympathetic in their ventures. (13)

The integrity of this new practice of theatre production to the new class formation did not please some members of the English residents however, and an English critic, under the pseudonym of the "East Indian", wrote the following lines in the *Asiatic Journal* about theatre production of the Bengalis considering it as clearly an upstart and obstreperous activity on their part:

We recommend that our Hindu patriots and philanthropists to instruct their countrymen by means of schools and when they are fitted to appreciate the dramatic composition of *refined nations*, it will be quite time enough to create theatre ... A theatre among the Hindus with the knowledge that they at present possess will be like building a palace in the waste. (14)

Even though the limitation of the English residents may have been the first impulse and model in the Bengali ruling class's establishment of itself as a viable socio-cultural entity, yet a response to the racism and condescension of their English mentors (as above), combined with their own need for a creative subjectivity and a historical continuity, moved them to produce their own theatre in Bengali. What they mainly took and adopted from the British were the physical representational devices and forms, the dramatic structure, and the specific genres prevalent in British theatre.

An attempt at this new synthesis becomes evident in Nabin Bose's production of *Vidya Sundar* in 1835. In the review section of *The Hindoo Pioneer* (15), there are two items that give a detailed account of this production. The critical criteria of the reviewers are very similar to British critics at this time. It assesses the production in terms of "realistic" representation and the "genre" to which it belongs -- it is "*trāgi-comic* and one of the masterpieces in Bengali". (16) One of the reviewers discusses in detail from the criterion of realism the acting styles, as well as the painted scenery or stage sets. By this criterion, "the young lad, Shamacharan Banarji [sic] of Barranagar ... inspite of his praiseworthy efforts, did not do entire justice to his performance." (17) But the heroine, Vidya, surprisingly enough, acted by a sixteen year old girl, not a boy as was customary, did meet the mark. "She never failed as long as she was on the stage. The sudden change of her countenance amidst her joys and lamentations, her words so pathetic ... were highly creditable" (18) as also was the fact that when her lover Sundar was ordered to be executed, "she dropped down and fainted and on recovering, through the care of her attendants, fell senseless again...." (19) This evaluation is done entirely in terms of "realism", or "naturalism", a tradition not to be found in the indigenous theatre tradition, which was instead highly symbolic, stylized and exaggerated.(20)

This internalization of British bourgeois representational forms however is accompanied with a strong emphasis on a new Bengali national identity as well. There is a delight at the fact that "These are native performances, by people entirely Hindus, after the English fashion, in the vernacular language of their country". (21) An irate letter in *The Hindu Pioneer* brings home even more clearly the importance of both the western form of theatre and its Bengalification for the specific purpose of the producers themselves. It expresses clearly the middle station that the new classes held between England and Bengal, and their need for a new synthetic form. In response to a detractor, who wrote a negative review of *Vidya Sundar* for the *Bengal Hurkaru*, downgrading the aesthetic quality of the Bengali play and its lax morality, the reviewer of the *Hindu Pioneer* insisted on his pride in the Bengali production and in general the ability of Bengali literature to compete with English. He wrote:

Much has been said by the correspondent of the *Hurkaru* about "*Bidya Sundar*" being a very indecent play. Is it indecent because it is a Bengali work? Is it devoid of novelty and utility because it

is a play composed in vernacular language of the country? Surely this has proceeded from nothing else but the writer's utter ignorance of his own language. The play of *Romeo and Juliet* and that of *Bidya Sundar* are much alike; he who thinks differently does not understand the spirit of Bharatchandra's writings, or labours under some kind of prejudice.(22)

Written in 1835, these reviews offer a powerful insight into the common sense of the new classes - into their attempts to build a necessary, organizing, comprehensive social consciousness which draws on both foreign and local sources. The reviews are often defiantly Bengali in spirit, yet they are written in English. They show a considerable familiarity with *Romeo and Juliet*, in particular, but Shakespeare's theatre in general, and the British bourgeois representational conventions. They simultaneously fight for establishing a Bengali controlled theatre, in Bengali, using traditional material (eg., *Vidya Sundar*), but also for the right to have the unconventional practice of women on the stage by appealing to English or western "civilized" customs:

The Native theatre is immoral because women of a public character are seen on this stage! Look, Mr. Lover of truth, to the theatres of Italy, France, Germany, etc., and tell me what you can object to the Native theatre which you do not disapprove in others?(23)

An examination of the writings of Michael Madhusudan Dutta, poet and playwright, reveals this same need to absorb English or western cultural forms in order to enrich the Bengali theatrical tradition. A letter of Madhusudan Dutta written in English to his friend Gourdas Basak brings out the process of a new cultural creation, which indicates both an exercise in westernization as well as a resolution for improving the literary resources of the Bengali language. Defending a play he wrote in Bengali, *Sharmistha*, in a language which is "a little too high for such audiences as we may expect now to patronize it", (24) Madhusudan assured Gour that the book "... will not be condemned on this head twenty years hence, for everyone is learning Bengali", (25) and that he himself is

... aware my dear fellow, that there will, in all likelihood, be something of a foreign air about my drama; but if the language be not ungrammatical, if the thoughts be just and glowing, the plots interesting, the characters well maintained, what care you if there be a foreign air about the thing? Do you dislike Moore's poetry because it is full of orientalism? Byron's poetry for its Asiatic air, Carlyle's prose for its Germanism? Besides, remember that I am writing for that portion of my countrymen who think as I think, whose minds have been more or less imbued with western ideas and modes of thinking; and that it is my intention to throw off the fetters forged for us by a servile admiration of everything Sanskrit.(26)

and British/western cultural forms, these lines are a powerful revelation of what was going on both in the areas of social life and cultural/theatrical productions. Falling back upon a sonorous, Sanskritized Bengali, in order to introduce Milton's and Tasso's blank verse into Bengali, drawing for an epic tradition upon Milton, Homer and Virgil, "to give our national poetry a life" and to "teach the future poets of Bengal", Madhusudan was one of the most important creations and creators of the new Bengali social sensibility. He himself leaves behind an interesting account of the changing taste in Bengali poetry. On one of his errands he discovers a shopkeeper who is reading his own blank verse epic *Meghnadabadh Kavya*.

I stepped in and asked him what he was reading. He said in very good English, "I am reading a new poem, Sir!" "A poem!" I said, "I thought there was no poetry in your language". He replied, "Why Sir, here is poetry that would make my nation proud"..... I shook hands with him, and on parting asked him if he thought blank verse would do in Bengali, His reply was, "Certainly, Sir, it is the noblest measure in the language".(27)

Madhusudan, who fell in love with the English language and the "best" poetry and dramatic tradition of the west, was also one of the first proponents of a "National Theatre," a prolific writer of plays. About theatre and his own farces on mindless westernization and hindu obscurantism, he wrote to his friend Gour:

As a scribbler, I am of course proud to think that you like my Farces, but to tell you the candid truth, I half regret having published those two things. You know that as yet we have not established as a National Theatre, I mean we have not yet got a body of sound, classical Dramas to regulate the national taste, and therefore we ought not to have Farces. I don't know if you have seen "Sharmistha" or if you have, what you think of it. There is another drama of mine which will be soon acted by a company of amateurs. It is also written on the classical model. As soon as it is out of the printer's hands, I shall send you a copy. If I am spared, I intend to write 3 or 4 more plays of the classical kind, just to give our countrymen a taste for that species of drama, and then take up historical and other subjects.(28)

This letter, written in 1860, along with the body of his work, shows, as do the works of Rammohan, Vidyasagar, the Derozians, Kaliprasanna Sinha, and many other serious patrons of dramatic and other literature, a sense of a mission. Never in the history of modern Bengal until the influence of communism/socialism begins to be felt from the mid-1930s, do we find another such period, when the elite of the middle classes, fully consciously, reach out for the responsibility of shaping a new set of cultural practices and ideologies.

Throughout the years from 1831 to about 1872, with the solid exception of *Nil Darpan* (The Indigo Mirror), which was written in 1861 but not performed

until 1872, theatre in Bengal was indirectly political. The three major playwrights of this period, Ramnarayan Tarkaratna, Michael Madhusudan Dutta and Dinabandhu Mitra, all wrote plays which were either social criticism through farces and satires, and sometimes epic-scope melodramas with puranic themes. It is the former, the social strain, which dominated the scene. Ramnarayan Tarkaratna, though he adapted and translated some of the old Sanskrit plays, mainly made his name by writing about the evils of polygamy in the Kulin sect of the Brahmins. Both the *Kulinkulasaravsa* (A Jewel among the Kulin sect) and *Nabatnatak* (The New Drama) were famous plays on the same theme, the latter having received an award for being the best play written on the unhappy fate of hindu, especially brahmin, women.

Certain aspects of the new class consciousness, marked by confusion, derangement, opportunism and greed unleashed by this new non-productive colonialist economy with its fast elaborating ruling and legitimizing apparatus is well portrayed by Girish Chandra Ghosh in his farce called *Bellik Bazar* (The Rogues Gallery). This farce is telling about the general state of class formation in Bengal since it involves characters from the petty bourgeois and petty professional setting as well as menial workers. It is set in the death registration office of the Calcutta Corporation, since birth and death have to be registered in the new system. This practice had never existed in India before, as with many other British regulations. But since it was mandatory and deeply tied up with the colonial property laws, the medical profession and the legal professions, it has an important role to play as a window to the changing society. It begins with a doctor coming into the office, engaging an untouchable (caste hindus cannot cremate or bury the dead) menial worker in conversation:

(Enter Punt Ram Doctor)

Punti: These muddoforas (undertakers) characters are having a great time! There must be all kinds of stiffes showing up - but I haven't seen the face of a patient in the last six months.

Untouchable worker: Respects, Babu! Do you recognize me? I am that old man, that Ram.

Punti: So how are things?

Untouchable: Well, thanks to your kindness, things were better before, but now-a-days the Babus aren't dying anymore - only these Oriya bastards are dying. (29)

As they discuss the difficulty of making a living from disease and death, Dokari, the "tout" or the broker, enters the office. He is from the country and speaks in a dialect - most probably he facilitates country-city trade in fish and lends money as well.

Dokari: (to the registrar) Sir, I heard that Dayal Das Nandi esquire has made his pilgrimage to the Ganges (i.e., died), but I saw no one at the site. Have they finished his cremation and left?

Registrar: What did you say, died? Of what illness?

Dokari: Sir, he had a pissing problem....

Registrar (writes it down): Show me the body.

Dokari: But its (for) the body that I am searching.

Registrar: What! You can't find the body? Constable! You stand here — and you, go and get a constable.

Dokari: But why are you calling a constable?

Registrar: Because you came to report a death and the corpse is missing.

Dokari: But, Sir, I just came to find out if Doyal Das Nandi died or not. Body - where can I get a body — do I trade in them? Are bodies like fish that I'll salt and export them from the other side of the Padma?

Registrar: Oh — now you have gone and spoilt my record book. Now tell me what I'll do? You get me a body from any where you can. Stealing corpses!(30)

This situation is saved by a starving lawyer who has come to explore clients for inheritance suits. Khudi Ram lawyer wants to know from Dokari the "tout" whether the deceased had sons who could be engaged in litigation over property— and the conversation between him, the doctor and the "tout" is revealing of both the difficulty of making a living at these new gentlemanly professions, as well as the amused contempt with which playwrights like Girish Chandra looked at the unsuccessful aspirants of their own class.

Khudi Ram: So, is the work situation dull?

Punti Ram Doctor: Very. How is yours?

Khudi Ram Lawyer: The times are bad - I haven't been able to do a thing. People no longer have a sense of their right. I have heard that in times gone by a million rupees worth of property was partitioned over a suit on a tree's branch. Fact! Now their sons have become serving clerks.

Punti Ram: Only bad times! This country is bad! A friend of mine just returned from England, he said that he faked illness and stayed there for six months, and in that time he saw that seventy solid new diseases were created and the doctors have other projects on the side too. Dispensary commission, liquor shop's commission, butcher shop's commission. The people there use neither meat nor drink without a doctor's permission.

Khudi Ram Lawyer: Before now no one could even meet with a lawyer — they were so busy, so in demand! Even their clerks build mansions and people then were really enterprising — they would forge, they would murder — if nothing else — just one criminal case saw you through your life.

Dokari's tout: Sir, forgeries and murders are happening even now

in every home - but the trouble is that every home has also a lawyer
 — Doctors in every home lawyers, everywhere!(31)

Everywhere the new theatre resonated with social criticism, in the shape of satires and farces. The themes of women's role in the family, and the society at large, and general tenor of English educated, anglicized gentry's life, kept the playwright's busy. One most important area of criticism centred on the excessive and sudden use of alcohol, and promiscuous sexuality involving prostitutes. Bengal previously, it seems, was never a drinking society, nor a society where sex outside of marriage was practised or condoned. In the well-ordered communities and extended families in the countryside, social-sexual deviations, such as keeping a mistress, fell within the list of a landlord's or a nawab's or nobleman's vices. The liberal ethics of the British settlers, and their colonial excesses, exerted a destructive influence in terms of consumption of alcohol. A disregard for the kinship and caste hierarchy and the family, lax sexual morality, conspicuous consumption are also the characteristics of the new rich Baboo, along with a self-hating, self-denying attitude to all things indigenous and an adoration of all things foreign, meaning English. In a farce written by Madhusudan Dutta called *Ekeyi Ki Bole Shabyata?* (Is this Civilization?), we have a first hand though critical account of this new rich young gentleman or Baboo of the educated sort. Madhusudan, no stranger to the excessive libertinism of the time, however, noticed that without some criticality and self-respect, the young Bengal stood in the danger of drowning in the quicksand of imitation. The plight of these men, he felt, lay in a complete dispossession of their cultural/social heritage and their inability to become actually English, or be accepted as equals by them.

On the other hand, as he pointed out in this farce, and his farce called *Buro Shaliker Ghare Ron* (The Old Bird Spouts New Feathers), it was impossible for Bengali urban classes to return to the past, to be unsusceptible to the new economic and social environment. A return to the feudal forms of a casteist Hinduism, he felt offered no real options either. He lashes out at the hypocrisy, sterility and extortionism of the Brahmanical Hinduism, at the same time as he holds up to satire the young cubs of the new rich. His hero or anti-hero, Naba Kumar (the new youth), sunk in alcohol and sexual promiscuity, is distanced from himself as much as from his family. His only ambition, and that of his friends, is to be as "English as possible". But since they are barred from really entering the English society, they form their own clubs or associations with similar free-souls, which include young men with a smattering of English language and ideas and some prostitutes, since "good" women did not appear in mixed company outside of the family, or practice "free" love. In this association called "Gyanatarangini" or "the Waves of Knowledge" they carry on interchanges about the contemporary well-to-do Hindu society - which has a curious mixture of truth and slavishness to it. The following is an interchange which takes place when the members expatiate on their aims and objectives:

All: Hear! Hear! We are jolly good fellows.

Naba: Gentlemen, we were all born among the hindoos but thanks to our education we have broken the shackles of superstition. We no longer genuflect in front of idols, the light of knowledge has driven away the darkness of ignorance. Now we request that you concentrate your head and heart on bringing about some social reformation in this country.

All: Hear! Hear!

Naba: Gentlemen — if you educate your daughters, give them freedom, get rid of caste barriers, and introduce widow-remarriage, then and only then will our beloved India be able to compete with other civilized nations of the world - otherwise - never.

All: Hear! Hear!(32)

Done in a tongue in cheek manner, Madhusudan nonetheless touches on some of the most controversial issues of his time. He does not resolve the dilemma of the westernized intelligentsia of his time but shows that the two existing options are dead-ends. He does not show any liberating possibility in Hindu revivalism, with its horrifically oppressive rigidities, but also makes it clear that Naba's worthy aim of reform could not succeed through the blind imitation of the ruler's culture, which branded everything Indian as inferior. Until something integrated this world, which had been cut into two, with a frozen past (Naba's father or the repressive interior world of the women), and a dead-end present (of playing English), into the private world of social repression and the public world of imitative libertinism, and some questions were asked in terms of the history and the goals of the Bengali society itself, the cultural-social world of Bengalis would remain sterile, infantile and tragic. He particularly portrays this in terms of male-female relationships. It is a woman, Harasundari, Nabakumar's wife, who has the last word in this play. Coming in the wake of the light, romping dialogue, her speech at the very end has a sombre and tragic note. She and Nabakumar's sister are sitting at the edge of a bed where he is lying, having passed out from his regular attendance at the "waves of knowledge club." They are discussing the city of Calcutta, and how lives -- their own and others' — drift here like rudderless boats. Harasundari, the wife says:

... Those who acquire their education in Calcutta, many among them, learn this lesson (of alcohol and promiscuity) well. Look at him -- who cares whether one has such a husband or does not? Sister-in-law, let me tell you, I really feel like putting a noose around my neck. What a horror! Then these shameless things tell us that we have become civilized like the whites! O misfortune! Can one become civilized just by eating beef and swimming in alcohol? Is this called civilization?(33)

This play by Madhusudan Dutta shows both the pitfalls of an imitative

consciousness and the possibilities for developing self and social criticism even among the Europeanized middle classes themselves. It asked for the formation of liberal, enlightenment oriented social attitudes. It avoided hindu reactionary views as much as those of the comprador imitators. His works reflected a genuine attempt to synthesize out of progressive practices and values of Europe and Bengal a kind of liberal humanism.

The main role played by theatrical activities, until the period of 1872 and even a decade after, was social and ideological. One could also hazard the statement that the main strand of ideological content at this time in theatre proper, was more reformist and liberal than hindu or nationalist, though there was also alongside with that a parallel strand of semi-feudal anti-liberal content. What is called "politics" however in any direct and overt way is absent in both society and theatre at this period of formation.

Even though it may not have been apparent at that time, the year 1872 is significant in the theatre history of Bengal. A break was instituted by the creation of the National Theatre, which, being open to the general public relying on the sale of tickets, and produced by white collar workers rather than the richest families and intellectual dignitaries of the city, ushered in a new era of theatre production. The private home-based theatre tradition continued, but became the dominant form. What came to be called theatre in West Bengal, with its location in public stage, accessed through a ticket system, was instituted during the era following 1872. Bengali Theatre underwent a fundamental change in both socio-economic and political terms. So far, as we have seen, theatre was passively political, expressing and shaping the social life of a set of new classes. More than this was not possible since the new classes were engaged at this point in self-construction and definition. What can be called politics in the modern conventional sense of the term had not emerged before the last decade of the century.

Politics in India today, including that of the left, has adopted an European bourgeois parliamentary democratic format, and is now generally equated with the only way of being political.. But this form took roots in India through the 1880s to almost the end of the first world war. The fact of a forcible colonial rule— which was democratic at home and non-constitutional and non-representational abroad — did not allow for an easy development of the construction of the polity as a realm apart and politics as a separate set of activities geared towards the state through organized political bodies. In any case in the first phase of British rule, when its legitimacy was severely questioned, the Indian response was a military one, aimed towards the ejection of a forcible occupier. This was done in phase after phase, the last and most powerful expression of which was The Great Rebellion of 1857.

Other than the fact that political forms as practised by Britain at home took time to be known about and naturalised, the classes which eventually gave political leadership were themselves for a period quite content with the British rule, to which they owed their existence and prosperity. The peasant and rural

struggles were both suppressed and feared. The three notable movements -- *Fara'idi* or *Faraji* (1810-30), the indigo uprisings (1859-60), and the Pabna Rent Revolt (1873) all came to nought in the end and the Pabna Rent Revolt met fierce resistance from the Bengali landholding classes, since they themselves were the rent receivers. Nor were they formed more fully as classes, both structurally and socially, to have become demanding or, later, competitive with the British before the 1880s. The British rule until 1865 was still that of a separate mercantile-colonial apparatus, with direct rule of the crown beginning in 1865, and never until the 1930s did this ruling involve even a modicum of representative democratic form. During the first half of the nineteenth century Bengal did not possess defined and substantial political bodies, though certain clubs and associations were being formed in order to consolidate the social consciousness and reform needs of the new classes. The Landowners Association (1838) was an example of an economic body expressive of class interest. Also there were *ad hoc* bodies formed in order to submit petitions for the Bengali communities needs, or lobbying and advocacy groups. (34) The other political expression of this time was the creation of numerous periodicals and reviews that were published with such seriousness and zest. Dissenting bodies such as the Young Bengal (the Derozians) or the newly formed Brahmo Samaj and the reformers all had their associations and printed voices. There were also particular individuals trying to define the new socio-economic terrain and the moral and political imperatives of the contemporary society. What Azad and Addy say for Rammohun Roy holds well for the new type of political voice. (35) Most of the political writing of this period--with the exception of those about the indigo uprisings, in which Bengali landed interests were in conflict with the British planters, consisted of social, moral and cultural housekeeping of the new classes. They were much less about the British or addressed to them, than to themselves. Like theatre, it was a part of such a coming to self-consciousness and self-consolidation. It was a period of putting together mainly in indirectly political terms elements from the new and the old sources, of making responses to the new structural changes, of trying to understand and coping with the violently disruptive and rapidly imposed new times without becoming socially schizophrenic. Sometimes there was the success of a temporary synthesis, sometimes a kind of syncretism or a co-existence of duality in the common sense of the middle classes.

By the time India became a part of the British empire in 1865, European political modalities had begun to be transplanted and transcreated in Bengal. As a political scene began to unfold, theatre and politics began to link more closely. Everyday life of the middle classes became less of a concern than the British occupation of India. In fact a political entity called 'India', so far embryonic in the political discourse of the new classes, had emerged, signalling the beginning of a nationalist movement. The middle classes which had spent the previous century in setting up their social base and space were getting restive to assume power which expressed itself as the Swadeshi movement. Theatre moved from

its social criticism and self-reflection about the Hindu Bengali upper class society to criticizing the British rule in terms of India as a whole. The new theatre in fact busied itself with shaping the symbolic apparatus of the emerging nationalist movement, whose most important result was the feminization of the country as a whole and its socially binding concept of 'Mother India'. Recounting and reinterpreting history, setting up myths and metaphors which would embody the political aspirations of the new nationalism, were the cultural politics of the day. The existing social relations and the direction of their dynamics took a directly political cultural form and became dramatic fictions of power. While the old genre of social dramas continued, it is the new theatre, in its different forms-- overtly anticolonial in its pre-censorship days (before 1876) and disguisedly political through mythological and history plays afterwards--that became a dominant mode. But as before, the Bengali middle class, born on the soil of colonial capitalism, continued to operate with their mixed mode. As their nationalism adopted the politics and terminology of European nationalism (for example, the liberal bourgeois of the French revolution and the Italian unification), so did their new nationalist theatre continue to retain and re-work the influences and forms of old colonial theatre, for example Shakespeare, Moliere or the new genres of melodrama and sentimental comedy. But again and simultaneously, as in politics, so in theatre, it was also a substantively creative venture. The Bengali middle class had developed for itself a national bourgeois psyche whose one irreducible component was British/European liberalism and the other a permanent settlement type of feudalism. In their course of fusion both the elements underwent changes and arrived at new formations, but nonetheless there also continued tensions and contradictions between these elements in the politics and theatre of the province. But these fusions, tensions and contradictions between forms and content, or within them, express as a whole and reinforce the middle classes' social relations, cultural aspirations and politics.

Theatre's involvement in politics was not mediated directly by any political organization, including the Indian National Congress, which was founded in 1885. It was largely a spontaneously socio-political response. The political organizations themselves grew out of a general turbulence and had a deeply cultural dimension. Every area of literary production was affected and stimulated. The printing press and the theatre proliferated and were kept madly busy throughout this period of the development of Swadeshi nationalism (1870s to 1910). In both cases the technology that the Bengalis got from their British rulers which facilitated mental production and the shaping of consciousness, the new literary and theatrical conventions that they had learnt, were put to use for nationalist purposes. Theatre and music became very important forms for expressing the new political aspirations and responses to the humiliations inflicted by colonialism. Cultural fairs and festivals, such as *Hindumela*, became forums of protest. Songs and poems composed during the period of partition of Bengal (1905-11) shaped the national consciousness of Bengal up to Independ-

ence (1947) and remained influential after. It is not an exaggeration to say that there was not a single writer or theatre practitioner at this time who was not a part of this vast, complex desire to be culturally and politically autonomous. (36)

Theatre, in particular, became a major site for politics. It is not surprising, therefore, that it began its public career by staging a play called *Nil Darpan* (The Indigo Mirror) which expressed both the current middle class and popular dissatisfaction with a particular aspect of colonial rule in India, namely the plantation economy. The public presentation allowed for the participation of a much broader cross-section of the middle class and removed theatre from the grasp of a smaller fraction of the new ruling classes. The bourgeois underpinnings of this political theatre is revealed by the fact that the device for this greater democratization of theatre should be entrepreneurialism, a mode which had become naturalized enough among certain sections of the Bengalis to consider theatre as a commodity. So in all areas--of content, dramatic presentation and social organization--the new play and its production remains a prototypical politico-cultural venture of the middle classes.

Nil Darpan is the story of the plight of a Bengali landlord's family and its well-to-do *ryots* (tenants) at the hands of the indigo planters. It does involve some poor peasants but never really brings them centre stage. It is an attempt to expose the relationship between the legitimate owners of Bengal--that is, the Bengali landlords, the rich and the middle peasantry and foreign planters who are actually capitalists. The play shows how they operate outside of the framework of feudal protection and patronage and at the same time employ and exacerbate the worst aspects of feudal exploitation. The politics and the social relations depicted in the play demand careful scrutiny, but the scrutiny must be contexted to the history of indigo plantations and peasant uprisings of Bengal. (37)

What is significant for the purpose of analysing the politics of *Nil Darpan* is the fact that other than the expropriation by the planters of large numbers of middle and rich peasants, there was a significant involvement of local landlords and *jotedars* (rich farmers) in the indigo trade in the capacity of growers. The latter also resented the fact that a parallel credit system was developing through *dadani*, which was cutting into their areas as money lenders.

So the nature of the indigo rebellion was very complex--since it involved not only the peasantry but also their superiors, not only resistance but also competition. Thus in some areas it assumed the proportions of peasant jacqueries, but in many areas there was a tenuous alliance between better off peasants and landlords against the planters. In the landlord mouthpieces, such as *The Hindoo Patriot*, we find a qualified support for some factions and aspects of the uprisings. And it is not surprising that the main thrust of the opposition was not towards colonial rule as such, but its abuses, towards planters who are carry-overs of the old East India Company, rather than towards the new administration of the colonial state. A quotation from the author's preface might make this point clear:

... the sun of happiness is about to shed his light upon the people ...

kind-hearted Queen Victoria, the mother of the people, thinking it unadvisable to suckle her children through maid-servants, has now taken them on her own lap to nourish them. (38)

After enthusiastically hailing the advent of direct British rule in India (1765), during a period when the British army was literally mowing down the Indian participants of the 1857 Great Rebellion, the author proceeds in his fulsome praise of British bureaucracy and civil service :

The most learned, intelligent, brave and open-hearted Lord Canning is now the Governor-General of India; Mr. Grant, who always suffers in the sufferings of his people, and is happy when they are happy, who punishes the wicked and supports the good, has taken charge of the Lieutenant-Governorship, and other persons, as Messrs. Eden, Herschel, etc., who are all well-known for their love of truth, for their great experience and strict impartiality, are continually expanding themselves lotus-like on the surface of the lake of Civil Service. (39)

The author, Dinabandhu Mitra, himself a member of the lower echelons of civil service, ends with a plea of hope :

... it is becoming fully evident that these great men will very soon take hold of the rod of justice in order to stop the sufferings which the ryots are enduring from the giant Rahu, the Indigo Planter. (40)

Even though it might be that the "Preface" is the protective cover for a play which shows the English residents of Bengal as rapists, torturers and exploiters, there is reason to support Ranajit Guha's view (41) that this play is essentially at the service of the local ruling classes of Bengal. At its centre is the landlord Golak Basu's family, and not the harassed and dispossessed Bengal peasantry. For the latter, their exploiters in actuality include the local landed gentry and the jotedars (rich farmers).

I would however qualify Guha's view of the politics in the play, by claiming that he oversimplifies the complex nature of nationalist politics of the time. He reads the play too linearly as a sociological document, which prevents him from seeing the contradictions in it. Dinabandhu and his class are, it must be remembered, *both ruling (conditionally) and ruled*. Their frustrations as such are expressed not only by their obsequious opportunism but also by a great rage, a sense of violation at not being able to rule autonomously. In that era of colonial rule and racism it was a breakthrough of courage on Dinabandhu's part to call the planters and the company "the maid servants", "the giant Rahu" (a vicious planet), "the tarnishers of British honour", etc. It showed that whites were not perceived as all powerful, but divided into inferior and superior types. The faith in the state and bureaucracy expressed in the Preface was likely inspired by the hope that a system with set rules would provide the Bengalis with a steady handle to question or manipulate British rule and expand enough to make room for Bengalis, if not

as "lotuses" then as water lilies or bullrushes, in the civil service. But most importantly, a less linear reading reveals the pressures of the images and symbols of the dramatic situations employed by the enraged and obsequious author. They go way beyond a class analysis in the simple terms of comprador collaboration and opportunism, towards a more comprehensive though essentially bourgeois nationalism.

One such instance is that of the scene where the white planter Mr Rogue is raping Khetromani, a peasant's pregnant wife, who calls Rogue "father", and to which he responds with a kick on her belly saying "I want to be your kid's father" (42). This scene, which interestingly enough is not in the English translation made at the instance of Reverend Long, (43) brought on expressions of mad rage from the audience. For instance, one elderly gentleman, a clerk in a British barrister's office, leapt onto the stage and started to beat Mr Rogue. The symbolic use of women for depicting the violation of one's land, sanctity of home, chastity of the female body and a general tragic disorder in the world is an effective and conventional device. Even in the toned down English version when Khetromani says to the go-between,

Aunt, don't speak to me of such things; I can give up my life, but my chastity never; cut me to pieces, burn me, drown me, or bury me, but I can never touch another man. What will my husband think? (44)

and Pody Mayrani, the procuress for the planter replies :

But where is your husband now? And where are you? No one will know of this; within the night I'll bring you back to your mother. (45)

the honour of Bengali society as a whole is seen to be in question. When devastation comes out in iconic moments of death, suicide, madness, prison, torture, homelessness--with which the play abounds--then the play begins to move beyond its surface story and politics into signalling towards catastrophic disasters which ravage Bengali society as a whole due to British oppression. This, of course, is shot through with contradictions. Middle class propertied heroes fill the stage, feudal notions such as honour and nobility take precedence over survival, which is the concern of the poor, and the heroic subordinate roles are given to the peasant who is selflessly loyal in defending a class which exploits him.

This image of class harmony between poor peasants and landlords or of bridging fractional rifts between the landlord and well-to-do tenants is present from the first moment of the play. At the very beginning we find the old landlord Golakmadhab Basu conversing with an elderly erstwhile rich farmer, Sadhucharan, about the terrible fate that is levelling all distinctions in Bengal's countryside. Sadhucharan becomes the foil which shows up the tragic loss of honour of the landlord.

Sadhu : Master, I told you even then that we can not live here, in this village, any more. But you didn't pay attention to me. A poor man's words are fruitful after many years.

Golak : O my son, is it easy to leave one's home? My family has been here for seven generations. The lands that our fathers rented allowed us never to serve anyone. The rice is enough for the whole year for the family, also we can be hospitable to guests, provide expenses for religious services ... we have rice, lentils, oils, molasses--all from our own land; and fish from the tank--whose heart is not torn when forced to leave such a place? ...

Sadhu : But now it's no longer a place of happiness; your garden is already gone, and your holdings are also well-nigh gone. Ah! it's not yet three years since the Saheb took a lease in this place, and he has ruined the whole village ... Last year because he was not allowed to plant indigo in the rice-fields, the wicked Saheb beat our younger masters most severely; ... the ploughs and the cattle were sold, and at that crisis two of our mandals (village elders) left the village. (46)

Through the first scene, and the play as a whole, there is also a message that goes beyond that of immediate self-interest of this family, and appeals to a feudal social vision of a just though hierarchical society where envy is absent, status and hierarchy co-exist with protection. The village of Svaropur becomes the microcosm of a world-order regulated by a prosperous moral economy.

This aspect, which escapes the attention of Ranajit Guha, is actually more important than that of crass self-interest and class-interest, in establishing the hegemonic or representational status of the middle classes, and showing themselves to each other (since peasants never saw theatre or this particular play) in the light of benevolent, well-supported, legitimate representatives of Bengal and the lower classes. It presented them with a powerful utopia, because violated, of a paradise lost, waiting to be regained, of class harmony, and pointed the direction of their nationalist struggle. It gave them an ideology which combined property, hierarchy, patriarchy with a notion of appropriate justice for all at each level, befitting their proper role and station in life. All together, seen as a whole play or a performance, the impressions of hierarchy and rebellion are fused into a very complex mixture, infusing rebellion into hierarchy and hierarchy into rebellion. It is this pervasive contradiction, this double signal, which always goes well beyond itself, which makes *Nil Darpan* such a powerful political play for the middle class, to the point of raising it to the level of the ur-political play. And so it is, because both in its form and content, it captures the double existence of the middle class, as ruled and ruling. Its commercial status and western five-act, scene-divided, tragic-ending structure, its praise of the British rule of law, anger at being discriminated against--all capture the politics, socialization and location

in the mode of production of these classes.

The political importance of this play is evident from not only the intense response of the audience, but also that of pro-British news and critical media and the colonial state itself. (47) The lead actress Binodini records in her memoirs one evening of performance in Lucknow which provides with a glimpse of English response:

... on that day almost every whiteman in Lucknow city came to see theatre. There is a place in it [*Nil Darpan*] where the whiteman Rogue is about to violate Khetromani, Torap breaks in the door and starts to beat the Shaheb and Nabinmadhab leaves with Khetromani. As it is the text itself of *Nildarpan* is really great, and the acting was excellent as well. Babu Motilal Sur was Torap, Abinash Kar was acting with great skill the part of Rogue *Saheb*. Seeing all this the whites got really angry and excited, there were scuffles and confusion and one of them ran up on the stage and was on the verge of beating up Torap. All this caused us to weep, the producers were frightened and the manager Dharmadas Sur to start shaking [with fear]. So we put an end to our acting, packed up our costumes and props, and fled to our lodging. Next morning we left Lucknow and breathed a sigh of relief. (48)

All this goes to show that in the colonial context, in view of the economic domination and racism, *Nil Darpan* achieved much more than we can see in it now only in the written text. What escaped Ranajit Guha is that theatre is more than a sociological document, it includes its context as well. The particular mediations which make a story "theatrical" can implicate and gesture towards different types of politics simultaneously because of symbols and experiences which go far beyond the immediate story and summary of the dialogue.

After *Nil Darpan* there developed a whole body of theatre which was far richer than anything that existed before, because a much larger number of people were involved in it, and a larger political and social passion for an autonomous social and economic identity was sweeping through Bengal. A new genre of "Mirror" plays was set in motion by *Nil Darpan*. The purpose of these "Mirror" plays is best explained by the author Dinabandhu Mitra in the Preface to *Nil Darpan*.

I present the "Indigo Planting Mirror" to the Indigo Planter's hands; now, let everyone of them having observed his face, erase the freckle of the strain of selfishness from his forehead, and in its stead, place on it the sandal powder of beneficence, then shall I think my labour successful, good fortune for the helpless class of ryots, and preservation of England's honour. (49)

Dakshinacharan Chattopadhyay's *Cha-Kar Darpan Natak* (1875) (The Tea Planters' Mirror) actually found its way into the Home (police) department and is now resurrected by Pramila Pandhe in *Suppression of Drama in Nineteenth*

Century India, along with *The Mirror of Baroda*. This act on the part of the government shows the "harassment and vindictive treatment given to the Maharaja of Baroda by falsely implicating him on a charge of poisoning a British official". (50) *Cha-Kar Darpan Natak* follows the pattern of narration of *Nil Darpan*. It exposes the brutal exploitation of poor rural people by the planters and shows torture and death through the rape of a peasant woman. It also shows, as in *Nil Darpan*, Bengali collaborators among the rural petty bourgeoisie, and an indissoluble relationship between the planters and the British colonial state. The analysis of the state is far clearer in this play. Its heroes are not landlords and their loyal tenants (ryots), but actually the people who work in the plantations. The following quotations show some of the political insight that the play offers:

MacLean [the planter]: You shall not go to your home. Why do you not come to my work?

Sarada: We do not want your work; pay our wages and we will go.

Barada: Why will men not do my work!--why have you taken away my wife's caste ... and she laid down her life. (Weeping)

MacLean (laughing): I did not take away your wife's caste. I sought to make her civilized. She did not heed my words; she died.

Barada (weeping): I will complain of you at the thana (police station). Do you not know that this is the company's country?

MacLean (laughing): Ha! ha! ha! You will complain at the court?

The Sahibs will not fear that. The thana and police are in my hands. She died of herself. If I were to kill you, nothing would happen to me. With the Bible in my hand, I would say you had the spleen. I am acquainted with the inspector of the thana, the Judge, the Magistrate, the Commissioner, and all. They are my brothers in caste. (51)

"Patriotic" plays continued to be written after *Nil Darpan*. We will mention a few to show why the colonial state treated these attempts as politically subversive. In the national cultural festival of *Hindumela* in 1873, for example, the National Theatre Group acted a play called *Bharat Matar Bilap* (The Lament of Mother India). It is important to pay attention to this title, because "Mother India", a humiliated, enchained mother of the masses of colonized people, became a central symbol for the nationalist--*Swadeshi*-- movement. This mother image calling all her children irrespective of class, was further developed by Bankimchandra's *Anandamath* (The Temple of Joy) where the mother is also identified with a goddess variously known as Durga or Chandi or Kali. She commands her children--her Shantans-- to go forth and fight for her lost honour and glory. The later phase of *Swadeshi* with its militant Hindu revivalism is encapsulated in this "mother India" symbol, when hundreds went to court death for the mother, and combined it with Kali cult. This mixture of religion with politics cut across class and helped to bridge the country-city gap in regions where

the mother goddess was an important deity (52) Patriotic plays with or without the symbolism of the motherland and mother India continued on the National Theatre's stage, and later on those of the Star, Minerva and others as well.

The colonial administration watched the development from social, self-critical plays which were attempts to construct a new bourgeois social consciousness, to this level of overt attacks on the British presence. This was directly political--an "open" form of struggle *against* the British albeit at a cultural level--but with great acumen of publicists. It organized the *internal* social relations within the middle class, in giving expression both to their experience of, and insight into, the colonial structure. (53)

The colonial state's response to political theatre shaped up into the Dramatic Performances Act of 1876, and went through confidential notes and memos involving not only the police and legal department, but august personages such as "the Most Honourable The Marquis of Salisbury, Her Majesty's Secretary of State in India, "His Excellency the Right Honourable, the Governor General of India, Lord Northbrook". Throughout the year previous to implementation, the Act was widely discussed by key provincial administrators of all the provinces under British rule.* It was even sought to be further expanded in making the audience liable to prosecution as well as the producers. As Sir W. Robinson put it:

I do not share the opinion that spectators should not be liable to prosecution. The provision is analogous to the law of England in the matter of unlicensed exhibition, and is most salutary. It is easy to enumerate cases in which we might have mob audiences defying the law. Ignorance or otherwise would be considered by the magistracy and influence the amount of punishment, but the law should be the same for all participating in the unlawful exhibitions. (54)

Plays on the Bengal Partition (1905) itself, according to Sarkar, are relatively few in number. One important exception was *Sabas Bangali* (Bravo Bengalis) by Amritlal Bose. From 1908 onwards the colonial state started using the Dramatic Performance Act to curb history and swadeshi plays in general. Kunjabihari Ganguli's *Matripuja* (Worship of the Mother), which showed 330 million "devas" (gods) fighting against the "daityas" (demons), was banned along with Girish Chandra's, Kshirode Prasad's and other plays. There was a ruthless repression throughout this period, not only through banning of cultural production, but by hanging, imprisonment, and other police brutalities. The Indian National Congress compromised by expelling the extremists in 1907, and by 1911, after the partition was revoked, politics in Bengal had lost its vigour of past years. It lay quiet but smoldering like a volcano after an eruption. Girish Chandra Ghosh (1844-1912), (55) spanning in his one life the history of Bengali theatre from the private to the public and commercial stage, embodying the most powerful aspects of this theatre in his plays, directing and acting, died in 1912. Bengali theatre lost its political and social vigour-- as politics began to develop

a set of forms and mediations as a separate realm--and differentiated itself largely from culture.

The theatre of Girish Ghosh, which covers the period of 1867 to 1912, can be taken as a representative theatre of the time. In fact the ideological and political complexities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, characteristic of the middle classes, can be found in a concentrated form in his life and theatre. Girish Ghosh's importance is incalculable since he invented, synthesized and put in place a dramatic mode whose form and content continue to be influential even among the political theatre activists of the present time. His influence on Utpal Dutt, for example, who revived his plays, wrote a book on him and uses his theatrical structures and shares his interest in history plays, is very great.

The nationalist project of Girish Ghose expressed itself most directly and politically through his history plays. He sought to recount the history of Bengal's defeat at the hands of the British in order to inspire a united rebellion by the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal. Plays such as *Shirajuddaula* and *Mir Qasim* were banned but secretly read and performed. They were not meant to convey historical information, but rather create political myths. By iconically posing Bengal's past as glorious and the present as degraded, this theatre made visible the social relations of domination around which the new colonial administration was constructed. It gave a new sense of time and transition to the nationalist struggle. It continued the mission of nationalism by marking out the stages of lost glory, and future desire.. It showed, as did Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, in his famous nationalist novel *Ananda Math* (The Temple of Joy), identifying India with the mother goddess, different incarnations of India's history: "What mother was, what she has become, and what she will be". (56)

Girish Ghosh also created an admixture of dramatic textualization with elements from Shakespeare (whose work he translated and directed in Bengali) 19th century melodramas and the indigenous *jatra* form. He produced out of this a highly complicated plot, with strong emotional content, and heroic, more than life size figures who, beyond good and evil, determine the turns of history. In invaders such as *Nadir Shah*, heaven defying figures such as his heroine *Jana*, and many other plays we find such figures, with which Girish Ghosh sought to provide a heroic dimension to Bengal's cultural nationalism. Both in his historical and mythological plays, which have a political significance, Girish relied on feelings--inspiration of imagination and passion--for political change, rather than rational calculation or criticism.

The dramatic types created by his plays became models for future playwrights, not only for the political ones, but also for those who exorcised his theatre of its political content and retained only the spectacle and the emotionalism. Particularly as the Dramatic Performances Act made it very difficult to write anti-colonial plays directly, the technique of retelling history or Puranic legends and myths, evoking allusions and analogies, remained a very important contribution for political theatre.

A few words must now be said about the controversy over the kind of plays that Bengali theatre resorted to as a result of stage censorship. The change signified by the absence of plays such as *Nildarpan* and the presence of religious mythological or history plays, but especially the former, has been seen as a sheer retreat into hindu revivalism and entertainment. This not only does injustice to the playwrights of the time, but confuses readers as to how one must understand the term political and evaluate political theatre.

This change is interpreted by Sumit Sarkar in *The Swadeshi Movement in West Bengal* in the following way:

But then for about twenty years the political interest is swamped almost entirely by the religious, and the earlier plays of Girish Chandra Ghosh--the dominant influence from about 1880 onwards--which concentrate on preaching orthodox values through Puranic themes of sentimental domestic dramas. As in the case of Swadeshi songs, the intrinsic connection which has been so often assumed between revivalism and extremism seems some what open to question. (57)

From a different perspective this opinion is echoed by scholars trying to assess the enduring value of 19th century Bengali Theatre. According to them the political involvement of the public theatre was no more than a superficial matter--a reliance on "the excitements of the contemporary life, on musicals". (58) They quote Girish Chandra Ghosh as saying that he wrote dramas "out of necessity". When Michael, Bankim, etc., were nearly finished being dramatized, there were no moreactable dramas around, then I was forced to write plays". (59) Girish Ghosh was further quoted as saying:

we had to write plays in this country for an audience of *Jatra*, *Kathakata* and *Half Akhrai* [all rural/popular "vulgar" forms]. If we had to please such an audience what options did we have except to write "puranic" (religious-mythological) plays?". (60)

The scholars go on to say that:

Theatre was revitalized from being occasionally involved with political events. But because its directors had no clear aim to pursue, the impact was not long lasting... we chose the stories of religious mythologies or of Alibaba type - over the depiction of political hopes and desires in the perspective of the contemporary life - because this allowed us a safe distance, and the scope to display pomp and prosperity. Even the craze for writing historical plays during the Swadeshi era could not leave a lasting influence on the stage. This "controversial" statement demands a discussion. (61)

These two approaches to the public commercial theatre, the first of which sees the constraints of the Dramatic Performances Act and the immediate twenty years of social and mythological plays as filling the vacuum, and the second

which sees only or mainly, a superficiality produced by commercialization and cheap entertainment, miss some basic points about the political character of even those plays which are so-called "non-political". This point is made very aggressively by the most well-known modern-day left-wing playwright, Utpal Dutt, in his book *Girish Manas*. (62) Though what he said in particular about Girish Ghosh is not exactly applicable to all of the religious, mythological, social or fantasy plays of the time, it still makes sense to quote Utpal Dutt because Bengali theatre of this era and into the first decade of the 20th century is the era of Girish Ghosh. He is the presiding spirit in all aspects of this theatre. For Utpal Dutt, Girish Ghosh is not simply a skilled entertainer, but an organic figure, a zeitgeist of the 19th century urban Bengal. He accuses the scholars and critics, who in their infinite comprador and academic elitism, speak of Girish Ghosh in a condescending and patronizing tone. According to Utpal Dutt:

...our most respected scholars also tear Girish into pieces. "This is Ramakrishna's influence," "this was learnt from Vivekananda," "these are the tricks to please the contemporary audience" - if a person is vivisected through these surgical knives they don't help one to understand the man's creativity. Certainly Girish was Ramakrishna's disciple, or Vivekananda's brother-in-faith. But much more important points of discussion are - in what kind of society Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and Girish were born, nurtured, matured and carried on their activities, at what juncture of social evolution they appeared, and what roles they played in this evolution. A person doesn't just float about in the air, he/she lives in a changing society, and their mental world forms through various confrontations and struggles. Particularly for Girish, who is a playwright and director of a public theatre, through him are expressed many kinds of social thoughts, frustrations, sorrows and joys. As such Girish's psyche was inseparably intertwined with the Calcutta of his time. (63)

For Utpal Dutt this organic nature of Girish's psyche and work make him an important political cultural producer, even in the work which is seemingly not so. The political nature of his religious or social plays is analysed in great detail, and with power and conviction. He situates Girish as an anti-imperialist, populist figure, who is essentially and always militarily, on the side of the oppressed, the poor, the marginalized and the law-breakers of a class-society. His vision for Utpal Dutt, is heroic - as displayed by his creation of more than life-size figures (e.g. Nadir Shah or Jana) - and his appeal is to the deepest and highest passions of his audience. Girish's intolerance, according to Dutt, is towards the petty world of the Bengali petty bourgeoisie; he is claustrophobic in their prison of trivia, where manners subsume morals. Hence Girish Chandra Ghosh's plays are seen as epics revisited - and by no means the sentimental melodramas that the Bengali

scholars and elite think them to be. Girish's detractors, then as now, for Utpal Dutt, come from the following group of people:

...even today there are those from this country who eagerly praise the British for bringing the light of modern civilization. When Girish first came into the theatre then almost the whole of the educated Bengali society was full of praises of British rule, quite unheeding of the cries of agony of the devastated Indian industrial producer or the peasant.(64)

Dutt considers Girish as a man of the people, of even the poor, who, even in his religiosity, augmented the anti-imperialist, nationalist spirit of Bengal. As he puts it:

Girish, and others like him, took theatre out of the music halls of the wealthy and made it stand on the money of the ordinary people. That is why many people, who sat together and watched these plays, could also impress their demands on them. Girish's plays were duty bound to please them. This is where we begin to sense Girish's partisanship to the different opinions of different classes. The choices he made kept Girish apart from the British created, British-devoted middle class. According to the judgement of the British-worshipping middle class of the time Girish was an uneducated man, a boy who failed his school. His formal education was in pathshalas (rural primary schools) and then at home. He parted company at the very beginning from those who found a job with the British, the same as attaining heaven. And besides he was "old-fashioned," "superstitious," an admirer of the "native" poet Ishwar Gupta, the near disciple of the Kathak poet Digambara, and himself composed songs for half-akhrai. So he was disassociated from his own class from the very beginning. Girish's thoughts developed around his own "vulgar"/"low bred" audience, prostitute actresses, and his social marginalized co-actors. He is not only a "theatre-wallah," but in the small yard of the complacent middle class he stood as a drunkard "Jatra wallah". From the middle classes well-schooled in English Girish only received condemnation, only ridicule ... (65)

This totally opposed view, which embraces not only Girish's work but that of playwrights and directors like him, contains a curious mixture of insight and blindness. The insights should be presented first. One profound insight that Utpal Dutt has, and that is probably because he is a practitioner of both political and public theatre himself, is that plays that do not announce their political nature from the housetop, or even deal with "political" themes, are actually deeply political - profoundly shaping of social consciousness. It is probably because his own work lies in the areas of popular perception, ideology and social consciousness, in politicizing "culture", that he learnt this. As such *Girish Manas* is a very

stimulating book, because deeply partisan and polemical. It expands the notion of what is "political" about theatre itself, and displays the power of ideology, symbols and narrations as material moments in politics, in this case in the nationalist movement of Bengal. Moreover, it is refreshing to see some one challenge the elitist view of the so-called popular art, and show how serious this business of entertainment is. Very few people who are themselves engaged in a political study of culture, who are with the oppressed peoples in their anti-imperialist struggles, can disagree with the opinions that Utpal Dutt holds about a strata of Bengali society where cultural imperialism had triumphed to a degree. But having agreed with him, that there was a strong political, nationalist identity-building aspect to Girish's energetic Hinduism (as well as that of Vivekananda, Ramkrishna and others), one still has to take issue with some aspects of Dutt's position.

The discussion about the relationship between Bengal political and social consciousness and theatre production must refer back to what I said about an asymmetrical, non-corresponding multilayered class-consciousness and political project of the Bengali ruling and middle classes and the objective structural reasons for them. The different strains that fed into the fused middle class elite conglomerate, with their incomplete, or rudimentary social formation and country/city origin, elaborated into different ideological strains, which I code named as bourgeois national liberalism, bourgeois comprador liberalism and petty bourgeois semifeudal social conservatism. Now these are strictly to be seen as a very broad approximation to classification - since semifeudal or feudal elements remained a powerful component for all ideological formations, as well as the structural and ideological imposition of British bourgeois liberalism remained a steady content as well. One could simply say that the degree in the ideological composition varied to such a substantial extent that the totalization process is more obviously in one direction or another. With these provisional statements in mind one could ask questions of Girish's ideological position, or of the position of others like him, and about the political implications of that theatre which is not overtly about history or political power.

The answers, or approximations thereof, clearly prevent us from fully accepting any of the previous positions on Girish and the theatre of this period. One would have to disagree with Sarkar's narrow definition of what is politics, even though he is astute and sensitive enough to include a huge section on culture in his chapter on "mass contact". A broader definition, equivalent to my notion of "indirect" politics, which is that of the "hidden" dimension of class struggle, would lead one to see that the plays in this stage as a whole are imbued with a social/cultural politics. As with the earlier phase of nineteenth century, there was another spate of redefinition, but this time in a reverse direction. This theatre expressed an internal organizational dimension of the evolving class consciousness of the middle classes, as well as the direction the ideological position could take to shape the external relations of struggle with the colonial power. However,

despite the contradictions which existed in the many levelled class consciousness of the elite conglomerate, the nationalist ideology of theatre from 1880-1944 came down heavily at the end of semifeudal social conservatism on the one hand and political liberalism on the other. The ideological position most often found in the theatre though quite frequently present among the upper professionals and the embryonic bourgeoisie, was particularly coherent with both urban and rural petty bourgeois and landed interests, as well as with the lower functionaries of the middle class. This, of course, does not make theatre superficially involved in politics as Raychoudhury et al. claim, but actually as deeply involved in the kind of social politics and aesthetics as it can possibly be at a broader middle class base. The high bourgeois "serious" theatre, including Shakespeare, whose absence they lament, is inseparably linked, it must be remembered, to the forms that they equally reject - namely bourgeois representational forms and commercialization. The "best" of the bourgeois tradition that they seem to want cannot be a priori considered a "higher" art than the "popular" theatre with its entertainment, unless the population which produces and consumes theatre becomes haute bourgeois as well. There is indeed an elitism and anti-populism about this approach to theatre.

A complete agreement with Utpal Dutt, however, also puts one into a difficult corner. It is useful at this point to remind ourselves of the last part of Sarkar's statement - that there is no necessary and "intrinsic" connection between nationalist politics of "extremism" (or nationalism of any kind) and hindu revivalism. Therefore, even if Girish and others were deeply religious and filling the stage with rhapsodic plays of devotion (*Chaitanya Lila*, *Prahlad Charitra*, etc.), there is no necessary reason to see them as inspiring a nationalist revolution in a populist direction. They could simply be a part of the eclectic syncretic compromise of economic and formal collaboration with social conservatism or traditionalism. Transcendence of any kind does permit one to have "all this and heaven too".

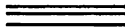
But assuming that this religiosity did have a nationalist import, a revolutionary potential, the question one would have to ask is what kind of revolution would that be and for whom? In this Girish and other religious figures are subscribers to a hinduism, which is, as I said, deeply sunk in hierarchy, patriarchy and Brahminized. Ramakrishna, having started from a small rural petty bourgeois background (and not in a poor peasant family) was further co-opted by the urban petty bourgeoisie, absentee landlords and a section of professionals. Vivekananda's egalitarian nationalism was reworked by and framed with a hierarchical priestly institutional order embodied by the Ramakrishna Mission.(66) Girish and others like him were populist, insofar as far larger numbers of people in Bengal were believers in hinduism, non-anglicized and non-secular, but this populism was a populism of small property holders. This revolution, had it taken place would have been of the petty bourgeoisie. In that I think Utpal Dutt over-

reads into the texts of Girish. Going by a simple opposition between hinduism versus christianity or anglicized Brahminism or secularism, and equating the first with nationalism and the others with comprador bourgeois consciousness - Utpal Dutt fails to see the class nature of the type of hinduism presented on the Bengali stage. It is true that "mendicant" politics was being surpassed by the middle class of the province moving towards "an open mass struggle".(67) No longer was the political voice, like that of Suren Banerji, in English. From the 1860's began:

the first major efforts of the nationalist bhadralok intelligentsia to attain "identity" with the masses and mobilize them around a programme of "passive resistance".(68)

But "swaraj" and "swadeshi" remained a project of the middle class. Its religious revivalism, which by its hindu brahminical and petty bourgeois nature also produced a muslim communal response, tried to hitch the higher class's wagon on to the masses of Bengal - but in actuality it had "no bread and butter" programme for the masses.(69) The two poles of "mendicancy" and "the cult of individual violence" - with all the real sacrifices the latter entailed - remained deeply connected by their class roots and ideology.

The social and political movements from the first world war period to the era of Progressive Writer's Association, Antifascist Writer's Association (both 1937 and after) and finally to the Indian People's Theatre Association in 1943 did not create such a great social upheaval in Bengal that it could spill over spontaneously into the theatre world. Within the nationalist movement itself in Bengal after 1912 or so, social issues were no longer vigorously debated - those social issues that could have been deeply explored and lead to the transformation of the civil society, such as communal relations and caste, had become re-worked and contained within the dream and demand of representational politics.



Notes

1. Gramsci, "Notes on Italian History", *The Prison Notebooks* : " ... the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as domination and as intellectual and moral leadership. ... A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise leadership before winning governmental power. ..." (p. 57) See also this process remarked upon by Marx in *The German Ideology* in terms of the development of the bourgeoisie's social and political organizational control, through the development of bourgeois ideology--in the section entitled "Ruling Class and Ruling Ideas" (pp. 64-8). Recent investigations into it are in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *On Ideology* (1978) and *The Empire Strikes Back* (1982), in terms of the political-ideological nature of cultural production and products.

2. See for example Badal Sircar, *The Third Theatre* (1978) : "The history

of the hundred years of Bengali theatre is in reality the history of this urban theatre imported from the 19th century Victorian theatre of Britain, moulded and developed mainly by the citizens of Calcutta." (p. 6) For an exclusive study of this theme and a list of English theatres, productions and visiting groups, See Subir Raychoudhuri and Swapan Majumdar, *Bilati Jatra Theke Swadeshi Theatre* (From English Jatra to Nationalist Theatre) (1971); also Sushil Kumar Mukherjee, *The Story of the Calcutta Theatres 1753-1980* (1982) and P. Guha-Thakurta, *The Bengali Drama* (1930).

3. Manmohan Ghosh, trans., *Natyasastra* (1950).

4. This claim that politics and theatre are connected at bottom and fashioned from the same social cloth does not deny that they are formalizing activities with their own specific and relatively stable modes of mediation. Doing 'politics' as constructive of the 'political' sphere expressed through genres, styles, conventions, tradition, etc. and doing theatre are two different things even though they share the same social space and may have conscious projects in common. These elements of commonness and difference are vital for constructing a political theatre, and allow for politics to include theatre and theatre to be political.

5. K. Raha, *Bengali Theatre* (1978), pp. 13-14.

6. Along with Bengali theatre there was also English theatre from 1753 onwards. It was mainly a commercial venture with permanent stages and playhouses. Mainly attended by the English residents themselves, at its first phase it allowed only a handful of the wealthiest of the new rich. But as it became more commercialized and a Bengali middle class with English education appeared on the scene, many educated Bengalis also attended English plays--particularly from the 1860s onwards. It is not an overstatement to say that without this presence of English theatre, and its steady influence both as performed and read (the school curriculum included English plays), Bengali theatre as we know it would not have developed at all. See Raychoudhuri and Majumdar, *Bilati Jatra*.

7. Tagore, *Chhelebel* (Childhood), in *Rachanabali* (1961), vol. 10, p. 138. My translation.

8. Bhuban Mohun Mitra, "The Native Theatre", *Nineteenth Century Studies*, 6 (April 1974), p. 190.

9. *Bilati Jatra*, p. 11 (my translation).

10. *Ibid*.

11. Sunil Kumar Chattopadhyay, "Hundred Years of Bengali Natyashala", in *Nineteenth Century Studies*, 6, p. 259.

12. Tagore, *Chhelebel*, p. 151.

13. In another review, *Samacharchandrika*, we find a response to a letter to the editor from an indignant reader who is less interested in the new theatre than fights of Bulbuli birds :

"28 January, 1832, 16 Magh 1238 ... A certain reader has written to us that you have published the news in the *Chandrika* of the *jatra* staged in English by

Shrijukta Prasannakumar Thakur. But you have not publicized the Bulbuli's (a kind of bird) fight that took place in the house of Shrijukta Babu Ashutosh Deb. What is the reason for that? ... The reason we publicized the play (or *jatra*) put up by Thakur Baboo was that *this is a new thing in our country*, whereas fights of Bulbulis or Mainas (also a kind of bird) have been going on for a long time in this city ..."

14. 1832, Jan to April no.

15. *Asiatic Journal*, 1 (October 1835), rptd. in *Nineteenth Century Studies*, 6.

16. Bhuban Mohun Mitra, op. cit., p. 190.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

20. This acquaintance with, and internalization, of a degree of theatre naturalism insisted on imitation of life type acting. introduced props or sets into the stage. The naturalist criterion is manifest in the criticism about the sets: "The scenery was generally imperfect, the perspective of the pictures, the clouds, the water, were all failures; they denoted both want of taste and sacrifice of judicious principles, and the latter was scarcely distinguishable except by the one being placed above the other. Though framed by native painters they would have been much superior had they been executed by careful hands." *Ibid.*, p. 191.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 194-95.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

24. Madhusudan Dutta, *Rachanabali*, p. 582 (my translation).

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 582-83.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 581 (emphasis mine).

27. *Ibid.*, p. 561.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 545-46.

29. Girish Chandra Ghosh, *Rachanabali*, I, 113 (my translation).

30. *Ibid.* p. 114.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

32. Madhusudan *Rachanabali*, p. 250 (my translation).

33. *Ibid.*, p. 254. If Harasundari had known a little more about the world which produced her misery and his libertinism, she would have seen that her reality was being constructed by a will far greater than that of her husband. The issue of alcoholism should be discussed here as more than a bad, imitative habit. Though Harasundari could not have known, but we do, that wherever the white man went alcohol took the area in its grip. Among the native people of the Americas, Africa, South East Asia, everywhere gin and gun, and other vices are found in varying combination. Jayanta Goswami, in his extensive study of the Bengali farce *Samajchitre Unabingsha Shatabdir Bangla Prahasan* (The Image of Society in Nineteenth Century Bengali Farces), points out some facts which are

relevant to the discussion he conducts about a few hundred farces based on the related theme of alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, prostitution and wife-abuse. He offers, along with all other explanations of European social influences, a telling hard fact from *The Gazette of India*, 29 January 1981. He gives us a list of increase in wine shops, between the years 1868 and 1878, and the revenue collected by the British government :

Number of Wine Shops

<u>Place</u>	<u>1868</u>	<u>1878</u>
Dacca	115	161
Mymensingh	94	384
Faridpur	26	55
Shri Rampur	2	14
Ramkrishnapur	1	8
Chattagram (Chittagang)	59	82
Bardhaman	109	125

We also read that the revenue of the government in spirit and drugs was Rupees 13,694,280 in 1879 and Rupees 15,076,830 in 1880. (P. 99 : my translation.)

34. See Sir East Hyde's description, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, for example of the kind formed by the local hindu leaders to institute an institution of English and western learning in Calcutta, which became Hindu College. See also Asoke Sen, *Vidyasagar and His Elusive Milestones* for an indepth exploration of the setting up of the middle class's ideological projects and institutional schooling.

35. Azad and Addy, "Politics and Culture", p. 80.

36. See *Bilati Jatra*. See also Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement*, Ch. IV, on techniques of mass contact which offers a detailed discussion of the spontaneous and cultural dimension of early nationalism.

37. The presence of indigo planters in Bengal dated from 1779, when cotton industries were being dismantled at the behest of rising industrialists of Manchester and Birmingham. See N.K. Sinha, *Economic History*; R.K. Mukherji, *Rise and Fall*; also Azad and Addy, "Politics and Culture". Britain diverted to the production of cash crops in Bengal and augmented a plantation system. In order to beat their Spanish and American competitors East India Company relied on the East Indian planters who had already organized plantations, and set up a plantation system through giving advances (*Dadani* system) to the local peasantry. As British rule dug its heels deeper into the country the planters resorted to greater and greater extra-economic coercion. They used physical force and their power in the colonial administration to combine legal means with illegal ones. They forced the peasants to cultivate at a loss, and took their land and labour power to produce the plantation rather than food or their own cash

crops. See Blair King, *The Blue Mutiny* for indepth research on this issue.

38. Madhusudan Rachanabali, p. 745.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 746.

40. *Ibid.*

41. Ranajit Guha, "*Neel Darpan* : The image of a peasant revolt in a liberal mirror", in *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 2 (October 1974), 1-20. Guha's view is captured in the following lines: "And thus *Neel Darpan* became the instrument--one could almost say, *pretext*--for the fabrication of a nice little middle class myth about a liberal government, a kind-hearted christian priest, a great but impoverished poet and a rich intellectual who was also a pillar of society--a veritable league of power, piety and poetry--in defence of the poor ryot. Coming when it did, this myth did more than all else to comfort a bhadralok conscience unable to reconcile a borrowed ideal of liberty with a sense of its own helplessness and cowardice in the face of a peasant revolt." (p. 3)

42. Dinabandhu Mitra, *Nil Darpan* (1974), p. 32.

43. Madhusudan Rachanabali, pp. 744-809. The English translation, which was done at the instance of Rev. J. Long, has edited this sequence out, though it is present in all the Bengali editions. This translation, which has never been acted, seems to have attempted to avoid the charge of sedition through this omission. But in any case, Rev. Long, who was its publisher, received three weeks of prison for this and was fined, which was paid by the enlightened gentry of Calcutta, such as Kaliprasanna Sinha, Vidyasagar and others.

44. *Nil Darpan*, trans. Madhusudan Dutt (Act III, Scene iii), p. 776.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*, p. 747.

47. The English newspaper, *The Englishman*, expressed surprise that the same play which led to the imprisonment of Rev. Long for translating it into English, which the court pronounced to be libelous towards the Europeans, should have permission from the government to be performed excising the objectionable sections (20.12.1872). See *Bilati Jatra*, p. 38.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

49. Madhusudan Rachanabali, p. 745.

50. Pramila Pandhe (ed.), *Suppression of Drama in Nineteenth Century India* (1978). This text contains documents of exchange of memos and letters that top administrative English officials sent to each other regarding the seditious potentials of theatre, in the process of development of an ordinance against seditious plays in 1876, and which became a law, known as the Dramatic Performance Act of 1878, which led to the imprisonments and fines.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

52. In other areas where the deities were most importantly male, the appeal of Rama, the man-god hero of the popular epic *Ramayana* (or more precisely Tulsidas's version of *Ramcaritmanas*) served as a similar articulating device. Gandhi's use of this theme of Rama--the just king--and *Ramarajya*--the kingdom

of Rama--as a utopia of moral economy ruled by an ideal man--was a powerful hegemonic device for the Indian National Congress. See Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement* regarding this issue of hinduization of the nationalist movement as well as Muzaffar Ahmad, *My Life and the Communist Party of India* (1970).

53. The comments of Mr. Hobhouse, the officer-in-charge of police administration, and the memos between the officials of great importance in the colonial state illustrate the British anxiety and the importance they gave to theatre. Upon reviewing the translation of the *Tea-Planter's Mirror*, and noting the libel case against *The Indigo Mirror*, Mr. Hobhouse wrote :

There is I think an obvious necessity for some power to prevent the acting of political plays. I can conceive nothing more calculated to do serious harm than the acting of such plays at a time of political excitement ... In England I believe all theatres are licensed and no play can be represented without the previous approval of the Lord Chamberlane. I think that some such law would be right for India, but I could not set up a Lord Chamberlane and would put the duty of approval upon the local governments. (Pandhe, *Suppression*, p.2)

The reply of his correspondent, Sir Richard Temple, after also examining the recommendation of the Attorney General of India, one Mr Paul, was the following:

Though fortunately this publication happening to be thought beneath contempt, had not apparently done anything to excite class animosity. But impunity may encourage repetition till at length excitement is produced. And the tendency in that direction is manifest. (*Ibid.*, p.8)

54. *Ibid.*, p.109.

55. Girish Chandra Ghosh (1844-1912). For an extended discussion of the life and works of Girish Ghosh and a complete collection of his plays and other writings see, Girish Chandra Ghosh, *Girish Rachanabali*, ed. D.P.Bhattacharya (1978).

56. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, *Ananda Math*. For an indepth discussion of this writer's fiction and political ideology, see Sisir Kumar Das, *The Artist in Chains* (1984).

57. Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement*, p.207 (emphasis mine).

58. Raychoudhury et al., p.35 (my translation).

59. *Ibid.*, p.35.

60. *Ibid.*, p.36.

61. *Ibid.*, p.36.

62. Utpal Dutt, *Girish Manas* (1983), (my translation).

63. *Ibid.*, p.2.

64. *Ibid.*, p.3.

65. *Ibid.*, p.3.

66. This mission movement, with an international out reach, was based on

the teachings of Ramakrishna, alive during the second half of the 19th century, who combined the cult of Bhakti with that of the goddess Mother Kali, by his disciple Swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda combined religiosity with strong nationalist beliefs and became an extremely influential source for hindu nationalism. See A.R.Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, pp.293-4.

67. Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement*, p.3.

68. *Ibid.*,p.3.

69. *Ibid.*,p.3.
